

MENTORING AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE
YOUTH: BUILDING BRIDGES TO
A BRIGHTER FUTURE

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ABSTRACT
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This project focused on mentoring at risk youth, particularly, inner city African American males. Due to the fact that the context for this project was a church plant, the city of Richmond, Virginia was the area of concentration. Richmond is plagued with challenges that are present in most inner-cities. The educational system is inadequate and young Black men are suffering and lack direction. Due to this lack of education, many continue to fall through the cracks, and into an abyss of poverty. Through this model and mentoring program, project participants developed independence, self-esteem and critical skills to become productive citizens.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I give honor to God who has pre-eminence in my life, to Jesus Christ who is my sustainer and to the Holy Spirit who has walked with me. It is because of the favor of God that He deposited mentors in my life that have paved the way and showed me what was possible. I want to thank my mentors, Dr. Lester McCorn and Dr. Jamison Hunter. I particularly want to thank Dr. Lester McCorn who has been with me from the beginning of this project. I want to thank him for his scholarly advice in helping me clearly define and articulate my research and writing, and in turn, helped to aid young African American men in their pursuit of a meaningful life.

I would like to thank Bishop Solomon Ernst and the Rev William Spencer, my peers and co-laborers in the Prophetic Leadership-Social Justice and Political Action Group. We are privileged to bear the name of the dean of Black Preachers, the esteemed Dr. Gardner Calvin Taylor. Without your support, guidance, friendship, concern and prayers I would have found this undertaking to be most difficult. To my context associate the Rev Jason D. Pough, I am most grateful, thank you for your friendship and support. I praise God for your insight and wisdom.

Finally to my professional associates, Dr. Tommie Jackson, Dr. Keisha Cook, and Dr. George Scott thank you for caringly supporting and guiding me through this project.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my parents, The Rev. Lawrence Crosby Hood, Sr. and Mrs. Marlene E. Mitchell who both labored to provide an educational and spiritual foundation; as I grew older, I increasingly learned to appreciate. I want to give a special thanks to Ms. Terena Young who has supported me unconditionally as I have given myself to this process. Thank you for being a real friend. I also want to thank Professor Thomas Jonathon Wilcox, who is no longer on this side with us. Thank you *Prof* for instilling in me to reach for the stars academically. Because of you, this project is. Finally, I want to thank my son, Ethan Joel Hood. Thank you for sharing your Daddy with so many and releasing me to finish this work. I love you more than words can say or you will probably ever understand. You are the wind beneath my wings. I pray every day that God would give me the strength to make you proud and your name mean what you are worth. Thank you all for believing in me. I love you all.

INTRODUCTION

The document and its contents are based on the concept of mentoring at risk youth, particularly as it pertains to the African American male.¹ It draws upon the assertion that with the proper guidance and programming, a person can reach beyond their circumstances and achieve at the highest levels. With mentoring, they can become productive and impactful members of society. This document draws upon the premise that until all of us are free none of us are free.² Dr. Martin Luther King said it best,

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. What affects one directly, effects all indirectly. As long as there is poverty in this world, no one can be totally healthy. Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.”³

Personal experience in concert with the context, this Doctor of Ministry Project endeavors to identify a systemic condition that is evident within the context of the city of Richmond, Virginia. African American males are systemically being marginalized and put at risk. This condition is discrete and hidden, but when realized and identified becomes overt and systemic. Young Black men are finding themselves existing and not

¹The term young male(s) or men throughout this document refer to African American young male, African American young men, Black young men and Black young males. This is done for ease of reading.

²The terms us, we and our refer to parents, mentors, the African American community and persons interested in the success of African American young men.

³James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), ix.

living.⁴ American society has placed young Black boys in a system that produces underachievement. With the right exposure and mentoring mechanisms in place, this otherwise inevitable fate can be averted.

This research project provides a piercing assessment of mentoring and its effects upon young African American men. It takes a look at how the African American community can help these young men overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles and become productive and solid citizens. The following chapters will provide a detailed explanation of this model, the literary work that will undergird the research, the methodology regarding the project design and implementation, the field experience, the data analysis, and the summary and conclusion.

Chapter one contains the ministry focus. The ministry focus identifies the specific area of ministry to be considered. Information on the spiritual journey, the literary work supporting this research project, and the problem and process for solution are also included. The spiritual autobiography and spiritual journey encapsulates life-changing experiences. The context of ministry is discussed with an accompanying synergy in order to identify the problem to be resolved and the methodology by which resolution will take place.

Chapter two is the State of the Art in this Ministry Model, which contains the existing literature that will inform this work. The various books, periodicals, and essays discussed in this chapter allow the researcher to argue, deliberate and defend a reliable position on the subject being considered. A variety of case studies associated with mentoring and its effects on African American young men are included in this chapter.

⁴The terms African American and Black will be used interchangeably throughout this document.

Chapter three provides the foundational basis that supports this project. This chapter contains the biblical, historical and theological evidence, which supports the problem statement and gives rise to credible solutions. The biblical foundation contains Old and New Testament scriptural references with exegetical support to express the problem and solution. This chapter also infers a correlation between a problem in the biblical scripture and the problem associated with the project. It also provides a correlation between the solution found in biblical scripture and the grace or solution considered for the context.

Chapter four supplies the methodology out of which this project will give birth to a replicable problem-solving model. This chapter contains the hypothesis, while listing a detailed explanation of the entire research project, along with the types of research to be considered. This chapter also lists the research methods and evaluation. A thorough timeline will also be provided. The conclusion of this chapter will end with a proposed outcome for the research project.

Chapter five contains the field experience. The field experience will provide a detailed and thorough depiction of the entire implemented process to include input and detailed reaction, response, and reflection of all of the participants. This chapter will also consider the effectiveness of the data collection methods to include qualitative and quantitative methods and triangulation of the data. As a whole this chapter will entail: collection of data, analysis of data, and the outcome of the data.

Chapter six contains the reflection, summary and conclusion. In this chapter, reflections concerning the implementation process are given. A thorough summary of the

project, room for suggested modifications and concluding thoughts will be derived from reflecting on the entire project.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

From the beginning, Lawrence has been prepared for this moment. Literally growing up in the womb of the church, he was not sure as to whether his call was authentic or just because it was what he always saw. As he reflects on his experiences, he realizes that his journey toward adulthood was preparing him for such an opportunity. As a young adult, he moved to Delaware from Pennsylvania due to the poor school systems in his hometown of Chester, Pennsylvania. While in Delaware, Lawrence was exposed to an educational system that was superior in terms of resources, but did not meet the needs and demands of young African American males. Thanks to the efforts of his parents Lawrence received a good education, however, he had many challenges.

The inner city was the context out of which Lawrence was exposed to ministry. Regardless of where Lawrence found himself, the problems were the same. Even while attending college at Morgan State University of Baltimore, Maryland, the struggles of being an African American man were the same.

Much of Lawrence's professional experience has been in the area of banking and finance. While working in banking and finance, Lawrence saw firsthand how people of color struggled to gain access to many of the financial resources that the majority culture enjoys, and to some degree, have taken for granted.

During his ten years of pastoral ministry, Lawrence became aware of Black men's skepticism of the Black church. Through counsel and open dialogue, it became obvious that Black men shun the church and public education because neither took interest in them. Many Black men found themselves struggling to survive, and as a result, have had confrontations with the legal system. Many have been the product single parented homes.

When Lawrence moved to Richmond, Virginia, the plight of Black men was no different. Failing schools and sever cycles of poverty; struggles with drugs and the judicial system seem to be the order of the day. The shocking reality and clarion call from these African American males was that they desire a better way. The sentiment seems to be that they were not given a fair shot, and if they could find their way out, they would. Reflecting on experiences in ministry and professionally, God has strategically placed Lawrence in a position to make a difference in the lives of young African American men; he knows what it means to be young and Black in America.

The church mandate is to make a difference in the lives of those in need. James H. Cone in his book, *A Theology of Black Liberation* says, "Any message that is not related to the liberation of the poor in a society is not Christ message."¹ This needs to be the major concern of the church. So often Blacks come to church on Sunday, have worship and go home. However, true church is what we do Monday through Saturday in terms of service to others. In his book, *Strategic Leadership for A Change*, Kenneth J. McFayden, talks about the "Pain of Change."² In this book, he explains that true change comes when we do something different. In other words, when we go against the status

¹James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1986), ix.

²Kenneth J. McFayden, *Strategic Leadership For A Change* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2009), 43.

quo. If we are to make an impact on the African American community, it will come at a cost. There will never be progress without some level of struggle. It has been asked, where have the leaders within the African American community gone? It often said that the reason African American leaders are no longer visible is because it cost something to lead authentically and effectively. Not many of those who have succeeded against the odds are willing to sacrifice their success to be a drum major for justice for others.

In Richmond, Virginia, there is a need for someone to stand in the gap for African American men; mentors who are willing to guide young Black men toward a preferred future. African America young men struggle educationally, with the penal system, and with the reality of living in poverty.

This Doctor of Ministry project proposes a plan of mentoring that would build a bridge to a brighter future for young Black men. In his book, *The Disciple Making Church*, Dr. Gary E. Tangeman makes the statement, “As the church we must be intentional in our evangelistic efforts.” He says, “We should profile and target in order that we would be effective.”³ In essence, the target has been identified, the problem is in view and this project is designed to provide a solution.

This project’s focus is mentoring young men in a comprehensive and measured program of making choices that leads to a successful lifestyle. The program will focus on mentoring young men in their areas of struggle. It will address areas such as academic achievement, self-esteem and self-awareness, financial responsibility and a host of other concerns facing young Black men. The success of this program will be based on the examples that program participants will see; successful African American men who have

³Gary E. Tangeman, *A Disciple Making Church* (Fort Washington, MD: Christian Literature Crusade, 1996), 249.

made it despite the odds and obstacles that were place before them. In other words, if others can make it, so can they. Having successful and trustworthy mentors as resources will prove vital as participants navigate life's struggles.

People for People, founded by the Reverend Dr. Herbert H. Lusk of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania will be the model that is used as a guide in this project. People for People, is one of the United States premier community development corporations. It has a charter school and child care development center. It is one of the leading organizations in the country in terms of taking people off the welfare rolls and getting them back to work. They also have a program designed to help ex-offenders effectively get back into mainstream society. From ones infancy, People for People, is committed to growing at-risk youth into strong and productive citizens of their community. Through a strong program of mentoring, African American men can make a difference in our communities.

The Prophetic Leadership, Social Justice and Political Action cohort, named in honor of the Black Dean of preachers, Dr. Gardner Calvin Taylor is the platform out of which this project will address the plight of young African American males.

Spiritual Autobiography

The journey toward pastoral ministry and a concern for the plight of young African American men began in Chester, Pennsylvania on July 24, 1968 when the Reverend Lawrence Crosby Hood, Sr. and Marlene Edna Hood gave birth to a son, Lawrence Crosby Hood, Jr. Lawrence is the middle child and only boy born to this union. Early in life, Lawrence knew that the church would be a central part of the Hood family. Lawrence's father was a pastor, and much of Lawrence time was spent in church and being engaged in church activities. His mother's family name was Jackson. It seemed

when Lawrence was growing up; all of Chester was either Hoods or Jacksons. Lawrence's late grandfather was a sports fanatic. As Lawrence got older, he also developed a deep love and fascination with sports of all kinds. Lawrence began participating in organized athletics, which foster and develop a competitive nature in him that would carry over into other facets of his life. He played organized baseball, basketball and football. Out of the three, football held a special place in his heart. Through football, Lawrence learned many lessons that would serve him well as he matured into the man that ultimately God called him to be; lessons such as teamwork, selflessness, and the importance of following your blocking. More than any activity in his life, other than the Church, sports shape his character.

Bethany Baptist Church in Chester, Pennsylvania was the Hood's family church. Reverend Daniel Scott, who pastored Bethany for over fifty years, was Lawrence's childhood pastor. Reverend Scott was beloved and made a tremendous impact in the community. He also was the one who licensed and ordained Lawrence's father in ministry. Hood Sr. would often talk of the time Reverend Scott spent with him and how he shaped his ministry. In 1972 Hood Sr. was called to his first pastorate, the Mt. Sinai Baptist Church in Wilmington, Delaware, where he would serve faithfully for ten years.

At Mt. Sinai, Lawrence was baptized and played a very active role within the youth department. While attending Mt. Sinai, he served on the usher board, sang in the choir and participated in Sunday school. It was at Mt. Sinai that he began to recognize the significance of the church and began to develop a love for the institution. The Hood family moved to New Castle, Delaware in 1976. Delaware was known at one time to

have some of the finest schools in the country, and the Hood's felt the Delaware school system would give their children the advantage needed to be successful in life.

The schools in Delaware were more rigorous than Chester causing Lawrence to work harder for his education. While attending George Read Middle School, Lawrence began playing organized football where he played quarterback; his life would never be the same. Lawrence was an introverted person but doing this season of his life, he really came into his own socially.

Next, he would attend the William Penn High School. William Penn was the largest high school in the state of Delaware at the time with more than 2000 students. Penn was known for its sports programs; even today Penn has one of the premier football teams in the state. At William Penn, Lawrence was a three-year starter on the varsity football team. Upon graduating from William Penn, Lawrence entered Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. Morgan was an awesome experience and his first experience away from home.

Growing up in Delaware, Lawrence attended schools that were predominantly white. Going to Morgan afforded Lawrence the opportunity to attend a Historically Black College (HBCU) with a great legacy of producing well-rounded individuals. At Morgan, Lawrence walked the same halls as Earl Graves of Black Enterprise, Wilson Good the former Mayor of Philadelphia, Kweise Mfume former U.S. Congressman, and Parren Mitchell, great civil rights leader and community activist. Many of his classmates were from different areas within the United States. It was interesting to see how individuals who were so alike in many ways, were also so different.

At Morgan, Lawrence began as an accounting major but decided after a year that this area of study was not for him. He switched his major to business marketing year and by the time he graduated, he earned a degree in philosophy with an emphasis in religious studies. At Morgan, Lawrence was an integral part of the schools community. Morgan did an awesome job preparing, cultivating and developing the leader within. Morgan gave Lawrence an opportunity to build relationships that would last long beyond his degree. He was able to develop lifelong relationships with students and professors. Many professors are still mentoring Lawrence today, decades after his degree. There were many professors who impacted Lawrence, but two bear special mention.

A. Ricardo Perry was just a staff worker in academic affairs when Lawrence arrived at Morgan. By the time Lawrence graduated, Perry had worked his way to becoming Vice-President of Academic Affairs. Perry constantly encouraged Lawrence and was adamant about him succeeding in the world. Perry constantly kept up with Lawrence and made sure he was on track for graduation. Any concerns or problems Lawrence encountered, Perry was there to mentor him through. As an adult, Lawrence regularly seeks his council to this day.

Thomas Jonathon Wilcox, Professor of Communications, has been a mentor and friend for over twenty years. He went above and beyond to make sure that Lawrence's work was up to par and that he stayed on the right road. Wilcox never knew his parents; he was an orphan who was left on someone's steps to die. Over the years, Wilcox has edited Lawrence's papers, letters and much of the correspondence he has written. Wilcox demanded Lawrence understand the importance of commanding the English language and writing.

Today, both Perry and Wilcox serve as references and assets that money could not buy. In particular, Professor Wilcox's commitment to the African American male is unparalleled. Wilcox believed that it was his purpose in life to insure that those he came in contact with would succeed.

While at Morgan, Lawrence accepted his call to preach the Gospel. At the referral of the Reverend Dr. Tommie Jackson, Lawrence began attending the New Shiloh Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland under the dynamic leadership of the Reverend Dr. Harold A. Carter Sr. Dr. Carter impacted Lawrence greatly; his tenacity for preaching and praying, and his commitment to ministry were unparalleled. There was something about *Doc* that made you proud to say you were a preacher. He also made it very clear to young preachers that it was a necessity to have both the learning in burning. He was an educated man with two earned doctorate degrees. During those years, New Shiloh was thriving, and you had to get there early to get a seat and the atmosphere was electric. When Doc would walk in the sanctuary, the atmosphere would change. Lawrence would often marvel at his advice and welcome the times he got to talk to him. Shiloh to this day is still standing strong with Dr. Carter having led them for more than forty years.

Baltimore was an excellent place to observe ministry. While it is not the largest city, it is a great church town where every night you could hear great preaching. Baltimore was very unique in that it is not a town foreign to the mega church phenomenon. You had the option of visiting many great ministries, such as, the Bethel AME Church where Frank Madison Reid is the pastor, Mt. Olive Freewill Baptist Church where Bishop Oscar Brown is the pastor, New Psalmist Baptist Church where Bishop Walter Thomas is the pastor, First Apostolic Church where Bishop Cornelius Showell is

the pastor, Israel Baptist Church where Harley Wilson is the pastor, at the time, the Pennsylvania Avenue AME Zion church where Dennis Proctor was Pastor. Literally every night some of the best preaching in the country was present.

While in school, Lawrence worked different jobs in the financial sector. One of the most exciting jobs was with Genus Credit Management, which was located in Columbia, Maryland. At Genus, Lawrence was a credit counselor and provided budget analysis and debt consolidation and services to individuals who were in financial distress. This job gave Lawrence the opportunity to help people that were hurting. Since personal finances have been a source of consternation within the African American community and the church, it became a career emphasis for Lawrence. MBNA a company that specialized in marketing credit cards also employed Lawrence while he finished his undergraduate work. Bank of America and Capital One were other financial institution that Lawrence worked; the financial arena shaped much of the way Lawrence sees the church.

On July 11, 1993 Lawrence preached his initial sermon at the National Temple Baptist Church in North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where his father pastored for twenty years. It was probably the most intimidating day of his life. The church was packed with friends and family from across the country. Lawrence was one of eighteen pastors in his family, so as you can well imagine, the church was filled to capacity. Although Lawrence did not have a lot to say, his mother and father were both filled with pride. From that day forward, Lawrence was given frequently opportunities to practice the craft that would be his. As a young minister Lawrence was involved in the denomination's association, minister's conference and state convention. His work in these organizations afforded him

opportunities to preach throughout the state and the Mid-Atlantic region. On July 13, 1997 Lawrence was ordained a Baptist Minister at the National Temple Baptist Church in Philadelphia. On the last Sunday of 1998, Lawrence's father officially retired as the Pastor of the National Temple Baptist Church after more than thirty years. Immediately upon his retirement, Lawrence joined the St. Paul Baptist Church of West Chester, Pennsylvania under the direction and dynamic leadership of the Reverend Dr. Robert Scott Jones; this was a turning point in his ministerial career.

St. Paul was uniquely different from any other congregation that Lawrence had experienced. Most of the congregation was very affluent. It encompassed professionals on every level; doctors, lawyers, corporate executives, politicians and much more.

Almost as soon as Lawrence joined the church, Pastor Jones was appointed as the Executive Assistant to the President of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. With this responsibility, Jones was charged to run the day-to-day operations of the convention. The convention itself boasted a membership of over 8.5 million members. Pastor Jones was also in the midst of building a multimillion-dollar sanctuary and family life center. As he traveled, he began to entrust Lawrence with more and more responsibility at the church among which was preaching, teaching and counseling the congregants.

During this season of his ministry, Lawrence was gaining a lot of experience at the local levels of state conventions and associations but not on a national level. Dr. Jones exposed Lawrence to the inner workings of the National Baptist Convention, and for that he will be forever grateful. Because of this exposure, Lawrence had a chance to preach and teach in places he would have never gained on his own.

In September of 2001, Lawrence was called to his first pastorate, the Taylor Memorial Baptist Church in the Germantown section of North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This would be a bittersweet moment as Lawrence really enjoyed the work at St. Paul's as well as the priceless nuggets of wisdom that Pastor Jones would often give.

Taylor Memorial Baptist Church was an altogether different opportunity. It was a rather small congregation of approximately 125 persons located in the heart of North Philadelphia. It was nestled in a community that was poverty stricken, riddled with drugs and ravaged with crime. Yet Lawrence clearly heard the Lord's voice telling him to go. Lawrence often asked God why he would send him to such a place after experiencing ministry at the highest levels.

One night after praying, Lawrence could clearly hear God say, "Why would I send you to place of strength when I need to develop you." While Lawrence had a great vision for the work, God sent him to place that was in desperate need of pastoral care and love. This was probably one of the biggest lessons God taught Lawrence at Taylor; people do not care what you know until they know that you care.

Under Lawrence's leadership, Taylor was successful in many ways. The church established a summer camp and after school program. It with the first church in the nation to forge a relationship with Sylvan Learning Center providing free tutorial services for inner city youth. Taylor established the Shepherd's Kitchen and Closet that fed tens of thousands of people who were experiencing financial hardship. However, the church had its challenges. Taylor had a reputation for changing pastors every few years. It was not a

church known for following pastoral leadership. It was difficult work, yet God allowed him to stay for seven years and be somewhat productive. The end of Lawrence's tenure At Taylor was difficult. After resigning, Lawrence experienced a deep depression and questioned God as to whether he should even be in ministry. It was at this point of his life and journey that God spoke and told him that he would be stronger from this wilderness experience.

One day while walking in a park in West Philadelphia, Lawrence's phone rang; it was Dr. John Kinney, Dean of the School of Theology at Virginia Union University. Lawrence began to share his current struggles; Dr. Kinney's response was for Lawrence to come to Virginia Union to finish his graduate work. Dr. Kenney responded, "Larry, don't let the past people and your past hurts affect the future people that God has for you to serve." The first Sunday in August 2008, Lawrence resigned from the Taylor Memorial Baptist Church and on September 4, 2008, he was enrolled full time at the Samuel Dewitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University (VUU). What a turn of events!

Virginia Union would be one of the best decisions of his life. It represented peace and an opportunity to regroup. While in seminary, Lawrence did not join a church. In essence, weekly chapel services at VUU served as his church and his Dean was his pastor. At VUU, more than anything, Lawrence had an awesome opportunity to become acquainted with himself.

No class impacted Lawrence as much as Pastoral Care with Dr. Harry Simmons. In this class, Lawrence learned how his birth order and how his parents felt about him during birth would affect how he related to others and how he would do ministry. Dr.

Simmons caused Lawrence to take a hard look at himself, the good the bad and the ugly. Because of this class, healing would be a reality in Lawrence's life.

Often the scars of ministry can run deep that pastors do not recognize the latent damage it causes. One of the frightening effects of ministry scars is the number of pastors and ministers who never fully get the help needed to make healing a reality. So often ministry leaders hide behind a persona not realizing the damage they cause to those they are called to serve. The VUU seminary experience was a very rewarding and medicinal experience; in many ways it saved Lawrence's ministry. Like Morgan, VUU afforded Lawrence opportunity to make lifelong friends, both peers and faculty alike. Both Morgan and VUU provided mentorship for Lawrence at critical stages of his development.

In his last year of seminary Lawrence was called to be the tenth pastor in the 142-year history of the Bethany Baptist Church of Montpelier, Virginia. In many ways, God brought Lawrence full circle guided by strong and successful mentors.

Bethany was located in Montpelier, Virginia, which is located about ten miles outside of the Richmond city limits. Unlike North Philadelphia, Montpelier is a very stable environment consisting of solid families and landowners. Many of the members of Bethany have been in that community all of their lives. Without a doubt they are a very loving people. In the first year of pastoring Bethany, it made many strides. Bible study grew and family attendance increased. The church, like most has had its challenges in the past. However they have been the model church in Hanover County for years. The church is very diverse in terms of its population. It has more than forty members over the age of eighty years of age. The youth attendance thrives as many as seventy children sing in the

youth choir. The average age of attenders is between the ages of twenty to fifty. Bethany provided a great opportunity to build the Kingdom of God.

On March 25, 2012, after much prayer and consulting with many mentors, Lawrence resigned from the Bethany to plant a church in the Richmond, Virginia vicinity. This decision was based on the inability to get beyond the church's tradition and affect the community. The church plant would be called the Resurrection Church and is now in the planning stages. It is Lawrence's desire that this church plant becomes oasis of healing and hope to the greater Richmond area.

Context

The context of this Doctor of Ministry project is not a church or facility where ministry takes place, but a city. Richmond Virginia is the context for this transformational mentorship ministry project. Demographic data will be gleaned from the city of Richmond and the Creighton Court Community Center; which is located in the midst of the Creighton Court Projects. Richmond is in the central portion of the state and is the capital city of Virginia. As a city, Richmond is known to have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country for a metropolitan area. The population of Richmond stands at 204,214 persons as documented by the 2010 United States Census Bureau.⁴

Richmond is unique in that it has several counties that border it whose population is greater than its metropolitan area. Both the counties of Henrico and Chesterfield have populations that exceed that of the city of Richmond. The city of Richmond is not unlike most inner cities of the United States. Many of the problems inner cities problems in America also can be found in Richmond. Problems such as poor academic performance,

⁴United States Census Bureau, accessed May 2012, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>.

high dropout rates, crime, and teenage pregnancy are realities that the city continues to address. In 2004 Richmond was ranked ninth out of 354 cities as the most dangerous in the United States of America.⁵

The city of Richmond is located at the intersections of Interstate 95 and Interstate 64 and is encircled by Interstate 295 and Virginia State Route 288. Law, finance, banking, and state and federal workers primarily drive the city's economy. There are many well-known legal and banking firms located in the downtown area of the city. The city itself was founded in 1737 and is home to both the U. S. Court of Appeals and the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond. Dominion Resources, Car Max, Genworth financial, Universal Corporation and Westvaco are Fortune 500 firms that are headquartered in the city of Richmond. Other fortune 1000 companies make the Richmond area home as well.⁶ Richmond has been one of the pivotal and significant places in the history of the United States of America. In 1775 the famous "Give me Liberty or Give me Death" speech was given at St Johns Church in Richmond. This speech was crucial for deciding Virginia's participation in the First Continental Congress and setting the course for revolution and independence. On April 18, 1780, the state capital was moved from the colonial capital of Williamsburg to Richmond to provide a more centralized location for Virginia, increasing the westerly population, as well as to isolate the capital from British attack.⁷

⁵Richmond, Virginia, "City Facts," accessed May 2012, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Richmond-Virginia.html>.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

The latter motive proved to be vain and in 1781 under the command of Benedict Arnold, Richmond was burned by British troops, causing Thomas Jefferson to flee the city. Richmond emerged from the smoldering rubble of the Civil War as an economic powerhouse with iron front buildings and massive brick factories. Canal traffic peaked in the 1860's and slowly gave way to railroads, allowing Richmond to become a major rail road cross roads, eventually including the site of the world's triple railroad crossing.⁸

Tobacco warehousing and processing played a major role in establishing the city, boosted by the world's first cigarette rolling machine, invented by James Albert Bunsack of Roanoke, Virginia in 1880. Contributing to Richmond's resurgence was the first electronically powered trolley system in the United States, the Richmond Union Passenger Railway. Designed by Sprague, the trolley system opened its first line in 1888, and electric streetcar lines rapidly spread to other cities across the country.⁹

Richmond is also unique in that it was the entry point for many slaves during the middle passage. The slave walk is a constant tourist attraction. This walk is along the James River. This is where the slaves were unloaded off ships and took the long walk to town to be auctioned off.

Richmond's history is rich and proud. By the beginning of the twenty-century, the city's population had reached 85,050 encompassing five square miles making it the most densely populated city in the Southern United States. In 1900 the Census Bureau reported Richmond's population as 62.1% White and 37.9% Black. Freed slaves and their descendants created a thriving African American business community, and the city's historic Jackson Ward became known as the *Wall Street of Black America*. In 1903,

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

African American businesswomen and financier, Maggie Walker chartered St. Luke Penny-Savings Bank and served as its first president, as well as the first female bank president in the United States. Today the bank is called Consolidated Bank and Trust Company and it is the oldest surviving African American bank in the country. In May of 1914, Richmond became the headquarters of the fifth district of the Federal Reserve Bank. This was a major boost for the city as well.¹⁰

Between 1963 and 1965 there was a downtown boom that led to the construction of more than 700 buildings being built in the city. In 1968 the merger of the Medical College of Virginia with the Richmond Professional Institute created Virginia Commonwealth University. In 1970, Richmond borders expanded by an additional twenty-seven square miles on the south side. After several years of court cases in which Chesterfield County fought against annexation, more than 47,000 people who were once Chesterfield County residence found themselves within the cities perimeters on January 1, 1970.¹¹

Richmond has always had its share of racial tension. In 1996 tensions arose when certain officials wanted to erect a statue of African American Richmond native Arthur Ashe to the famed series of statues of Confederate heroes to the Civil War on Monument Ave. After several months of controversy the bronze statue of Ashe was finally completed on Monument Avenue facing the opposite direction from the confederate heroes on July 10, 1986.¹²

¹⁰Infoplease, "Virginia," accessed August 2012, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Richmond-Virginia.html>.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²New York Post, "Arthur Ashe Statue Set Up in Richmond at Last," accessed August 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/05/us/arthur-ashe-statue-set-up-in-richmond-at-last.html>.

Richmond is not unlike many other major cities in that three of the major areas of concern are the educational system, crime and poverty. In the educational system there is a divide between the have and have not's. Even though it is 2012, there is a degree of segregation in the Richmond school system. According to the range of studies cited by Genivieve Siegel Hawley of the Civil Rights Project at the University of California at Los Angeles, schools isolate by poverty and race are associated with lower graduation rates, high rates of teacher turnover, inadequate facilities and resources, and significantly lower academic achievement. This particular fact has proven itself true as it relates to the city of Richmond's school system. Conversely, racially and socioeconomically diverse schools are associated with higher academic achievement, higher college attendance rates, and higher levels of critical thinking, more prestigious jobs and an ability to adopt multiple perspectives.¹³

Richmond schools are plagued with high dropout rates and the improvement efforts seem to be remedial at best. The school district's poverty rate is at 75 percent; it has more than double the 36 percent of impoverished youths in the city of Richmond at large. Race and class issues in Richmond run hand and hand. The investment made in underperforming schools which overwhelmingly are occupied by people of color, is significantly less than the majority culture schools. More economic diversity in schools is necessary.

Another major problem is the emphasis on standardized testing. The emphasis on memorization and testing is outdated and is hurting the educational process in Richmond.

¹³Genivieve Siegel Hawley, "The Civil Rights Project" University of California at Los Angeles, accessed August 2012, <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/about-us/staff/genevieve-siegel-hawley>.

The poor school districts are always in panic mode trying to keep test scores up to avoid sanctions by the state and federal government.

Finally on this issue of education, the overwhelming numbers of children that fall through the cracks are children of color. These children are not just placed in situations where they are not able to succeed but they find themselves in a downward spiral that is almost impossible to stop. Some believe this has been done systematically in American culture to keep people of color in their place. Not only are these children disproportionately minority, a greater percentage of them are African American males. As a result of this poor educational process, many are left unable to care for their families. Many of these children are left illiterate with no skills that would allow them to obtain decent jobs or employment. Systemic despair and hopelessness cause many of these children to become adults who cannot navigate life's systems, so they end up on the streets.

After hopelessness sets in, a life of crime emerges and eventually the penal system that will render them forever second-class citizens. Since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's and 70's, there has been a decline in activism centered on the improvement of the school system that serve African American communities. Some feel this is because of the growth of the Black middle class. African American children are at risk and there must be methods put in place to make sure they are properly cared for. Greater extremes must be taken to make sure that the educational systems are equitable and that each child is given a chance.

Education or the lack thereof, affect children in more ways than many adults are willing to consider. Psychologists have found that attributes such as self-esteem can be

traced to a child's level of education. Parents and caregivers must strive to provide their children with examples of success and ways in which they can achieve it. African American children must be given support and undergirded with the assurance that they are surrounded by individuals with the same experiences who have achieved.

Another important component is that of mentoring. Parents search for both formal and informal methods of mentoring their children. Studies have shown that mentoring is an effective tool in the nurture and success of children. If parents and caregivers make concerted efforts to create change, they can affect the educational system and their children in a powerful way.

The issues of poverty and crime seem to go hand and hand. As stated earlier, both of these realities can be traced back to an educational system that in many ways have failed today's inner city African American youth. As it relates to the issue of poverty and crime, much can be learned from the growing numbers of African American men that are being housed in prisons across America. Many of these individuals are in prison as a direct result of failed educational systems that produced individuals that cannot read, and lack the skills necessary to care for themselves, and live an independent existence.

The prison industrial complex has become big business and depends largely on vulnerable and at-risk minorities to make sure that this enormous stream of income continues to grow. There is no doubt that if young white people were incarcerated at the same rate as young Black people, the issue would be a national emergency. However, it is also true, that if young middle and upper class Blacks were incarcerated at the same rate as young poor Blacks, Black leaders would focus more on the prison industrial complex.

In the book, *The New Jim Crow*, written by Michelle Alexander, asserts that prison systems created in this country have established a new cast system. Alexander further states that the United States prison system has replaced the old engine of Jim Crow. In this polemic work, Alexander tells the story of Jarvious Cotton. She says, “Jarvious cannot vote. Like his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great grandfather, he has been denied the right to participate in our electoral democracy.

Cotton’s family tree tells the story of several generations of Black men who were born in the United States but who were denied the most basic freedom that democracy promises, the freedom to vote for those that would make the rules and laws that govern one’s life. Cotton’s great-grandfather could not vote as a slave. The Klu Klux Klan for attempting to vote beat his great grandfather to death. His grandfather was prevented from voting by Klan intimidation. His father was barred by poll taxes and literacy tests. Today, Jarvious Cotton cannot vote because he, like many Black men in the United States, have been labeled a felon and is currently on parole.”¹⁴ Cotton’s story illustrates the more things change the more they remain the same. In each subsequent generation new tactics are introduced to achieve the same goals.

The arguments and rationalizations that have been trotted out in support of racial exclusion and discrimination in its various forms have changed and evolved, but the outcome has remained largely the same. An extraordinary percentage of Black men in the United States are legally barred from voting today, just as they have been throughout most of American history. They are also subject to legalized discrimination in employment, housing, education, public benefits, and jury service, just as their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were.

¹⁴Michelle Anderson, *The New Jim Crow* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012).

What changed since the collapse of Jim Crow has less to do with the basic structure of our society than with the language used for its justification. In an era of colorblindness, the explicit use of race is no longer socially permissible as justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt; therefore, its use is discontinued. Rather than rely on race, society now uses the criminal justice system to label people of color as criminals, and then engage in practices that supposedly were left behind.

In today's climate, it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in ways that were once legally reserved for African Americans. Once you are labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of voting rights, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service are suddenly legal. As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a Black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. To support this argument stands the ever-present racial caste system in America; we have merely redesigned it. This can be seen in a hyperbolic way in the reality of the city of Richmond. This phenomenon has seemed to cripple and take over the city and must be addressed.

Synergy

Looking back over the course of Lawrence's life, his experiences where preparing him for a time such as this. Looking at his life journey and experiences and the work that lies ahead in the city of Richmond, he is equipped and fortified with the vision that has been placed clearly in his view. Growing up in a household where both parents were instrumental in shaping his life and character, gave Lawrence certain balance and confidence needed to face such a tumultuous world. Lawrence's parents instilled in him

the importance of faith and believing in God, but they also instilled in him the values and significance of a solid education. Both were important, and as Lawrence faced life's difficulties, he was undergirded with the assurance that both brought him.

Looking at the city of Richmond, Virginia and many of the problems that plague its youth, there is no doubt that Lawrence's experiences were tailor made to relieve some of the city's challenges regarding young African American males. When he looks at the city, high populations of the children who are at-risk are living in single parent homes. Lawrence saw in his parents, strength, fortitude, a sense of protection and a nurturing presence that has guided him in a right and safe direction. From them, he was constantly taught manners and the difference between right and wrong; these things were constantly re-enforced. The absence of either of these will contribute to children being disadvantaged in many different areas. Children with the absence of one or more parents in the home tend to perform poor academically than those with both parents in the home. These kids are less likely to become productive members of their communities. Most of the children that occupy the prison system in the United States of America are products of this type of environment.

Many inner city school systems have failed African American youth. Many children are placed in schools that are underfunded and academically inferior. There is an absence of adequate technology, and simple resources, textbooks are not sufficient, and there is often a lack of committed teachers. Many of the school districts that serve African Americans are not well funded in proportion to their white counterparts.

Another alarming problem of inner city school districts is the alarmingly high rate of young men and women who are dropping out before they reach the twelfth grade.

These staggering realities are producing a permanent underclass; a class of young adults that are not able to deal with the realities of the world. A world that can be difficult under the best of situations will now await them. These individuals will be faced with poverty, joblessness, incarceration and a host of other social challenges that will render them distressed as well as hopeless.

Lawrence was provided a path in life that equipped him to successfully handle the challenges that the youth of Richmond face. Community development today is nothing more than a modern day program of social justice. James Cone said it best in his book, *A Black Theology of liberation*, "God is revealed as the God of the oppressed, involved in their history, liberating them from human bondage." As displayed in the subsequent paragraphs, having the proper guidance is integral in terms of growing up and having an adequate chance to survive in this world. Effective community development through the medium of transformative mentoring can be an effective tool in the elevation of at-risk youth, particularly, those of color, who are concentrated in the metropolitan area of Richmond Virginia, but also in many inner cities across America.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY PROJECT

In the creation of this project model, several books were reviewed that informed this work. This project focus is male mentoring, particularly as it pertains to the African American male; therefore, resources were heavily drawn from books that spoke to the plight of African American males. There was a deliberate attempt to be opened minded while considering the books that would be included. In particular areas such as poverty, education, the legal system and racism were heavy considerations. These categories were paramount in exploring the African American male's plight and developing a successful mentoring program.

In considering what books to engage, no book quite encapsulated the African American male plight like Michelle Alexander's polemic work, *The New Jim Crow*. In this book Alexander points out how Black Men have become targets. She chronicles the evolution of the Prison Industrial Complex and its effects on the Black community and particularly our Black men. She points out the problems and discusses possible solutions to the problem. Alexander calls the incarceration problem among our African American men the new caste system. As the books title suggest, she calls this new epidemic the New Jim Crow. Alexander chronicles the African American male's plight from slavery and makes the incredible assertion that the rights that were legally taken away from Blacks during slavery are now being perpetuated on our African American men by

classifying them as felons. This labeling of felon strips them of their right to vote, their right to adequate housing and their ability to earn an honest living, thereby creating a perpetual cycle of poverty that ultimately tears at the fabric of the African American family.

In many cases, these individuals are left to feel hopeless and a seemingly endless pattern of poverty begins to ensue. Alexander talks about the impact that the war on drugs has had within the African American community. She says, “The impact of the drug war has been astounding, in less than thirty years, the U.S. penal population exploded from around 300,000 to more than two million, with drug convictions accounting for the majority of the increase. The United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world.”¹

Most of the newly incarcerated during this time have been overwhelmingly and disproportionately African American men. She makes the inference that these stark racial disparities cannot be explained by rates of drug crime. Studies show that non-people of color use and sell illegal drugs at remarkably similar rates. Amazingly Alexander asserts that if there are significant differences in surveys to be found, they frequently suggest that whites, particularly white youth, are more likely to engage in drug crime over people of color.

However, that is not what one would see when entering our nation’s prisons and jails, which are overflowing with Black and brown drug offenders.” In some states, Black men have been admitted to prison on drug charges at rates twenty to fifty times greater than those of white men. In major cities wracked by the drug war, as many as 80 percent

¹Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010), 6.

of young African American men now have criminal records and are thus subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives.”² The inference is made that these men, growing under caste, are permanently locked up and locked out of mainstream society.

The notion that whites comprise the vast majority of drug users and dealers, and are more likely than other racial groups to commit drug crimes may seem implausible to some, given the media imagery we are fed on a daily basis and the racial composition of our prisons and jails. What is painfully obvious when stepping back from individual cases, and specific policies, is that the system of mass incarceration operates with stunning efficiency to sweep people of color of the streets, lock them in cages, and then release them into an inferior second-class status. Nowhere is this truer than the war on drugs. It is the intention that this project helps to eradicate downward trends in our youth. If we can provide the adequate mentoring and guidance that our African American boys so desperately need, they will have a better chance of avoiding some of the traps and obstacles that have been set before them.

As the theological consideration for this project the writer chose the subject of liberation theology. The writer has long admired the work of Dr. James H. Cone, who is considered by many to be the father of Black Liberation Theology. The first book by Dr. Cone that was considered was, *A Black Theology of Liberation*.³ This was an easy choice given the plight of our young African American boys. At its core, liberation theology is concerned about the plight of those that have been oppressed and marginalized. No one writes as passionately about the plight of the Black race as eloquently as James H. Cone. Cone asserts, “Theology is contextual language, that is, defined by the human situation

²Ibid., 12.

³James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).

that gives birth to it.”⁴ In other words, Cone is saying that our theology in a large part will be viewed through the lens of our existential reality.

In this work, Cone challenges the Black church to be change agents in pursuit of justice and equality. He challenges the church to not wait for others to do for them, what it should be doing for itself. Cones states in this work, “There is an interconnectedness of all humanity that makes the freedom of one people dependent upon the liberation of all. No one can be free until all are set free.”⁵ He goes on to say that Martin Luther King expressed this point persuasively:

We are caught in an escapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. What affects one directly, affects all indirectly. As long as there is poverty in this world, no one can be totally healthy. Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be⁶

Cone paints a picture of humanity’s responsibility to each other. He states, “Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. This means that its sole reason for existence is to put into ordered speech the meaning of God’s activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that its inner thrust for liberation is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ. There can be no Christian theology that is not identified unreservedly with those who are humiliated and abused. In fact, theology ceases to be a theology of the gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed. For it is impossible to speak of the

⁴Ibid., xv.

⁵Ibid., xxi.

⁶Ibid.

God of Israelite history, who is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, without recognizing that God is the God of and for those who labor and are overladen.”⁷ It is the responsibility of the church and all who call themselves Christians to be concerned about those who would be considered the least of these.

The next book used in this work is *Black Theology and Black Power*, also written by James Cone. In this book Cone defines Black Power as “Black people taking the dominant role in determining the Black-white relationship in American Society.”⁸ Cone speaks of the rampant racism that has plagued America. He makes the assertion that modern racism is European in origin, and America has been its vigorous offspring. It is the majority culture that has sought to dehumanize others because of his feelings of superiority or for his economic advantage. Racism is so imbedded in this country that it is hard to imagine that any of the majority culture can escape it. Despite the fact that racism exist, African Americans can still achieve and become productive agents of change with the proper guidance and mentoring. In this work, Cone establishes that we must become the change that we want to see.

It is impossible to treat or approach the subject of liberation theology without talking about Gustavo Gutierrez. Gutierrez is considered to be the father of liberation theology. Despite what many have come to believe, liberation theology does not find its origins within the African American community but rather finds it origin in Latin America.

⁷Ibid., 1.

⁸James H. Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 1.

An Introduction to Liberation Theology by Robert McAfee Brown explores the life and thought of Gustavo Gutierrez. Gutierrez had a passion for the poor and Brown infers so in his work. In this book Brown quotes Gutierrez, “Theology in Latin America today will be a reflection in, and on, faith as liberation praxis. It will be an understanding of the faith from an option and a commitment. It will be an understanding of the faith from a point of departure in real, effective solidarity with the exploited classes, oppressed ethnic groups, and despised cultures of Latin America, and from within their world. It will be a reflection that starts out from a commitment to create a just society; a community of sisters and brothers, that ought to see that this commitment grow more radical and complete. It will be a theological reflection that becomes true, verified, in real and fruitful involvement in the liberation process.”⁹

In this work the parallel is made between North American and Latin American liberation theology. The author shows the effects of colonialism and the need for liberation in both locales. In an unusual way, Gustavo Gutierrez’s thought process resembles that of James H. Cone, as he believes that history must be changed around, not from above but from below. There is no evil in being a subversive, struggling against the capitalist system; rather what is evil today is to be a loyalist, a supporter to the existing domination. Like Cone, Gutierrez feels that change will have to come from those who are being oppressed. It will be up to us to make the difference. Change will begin with those that have been the object of the oppression.

Another book that has informed the research and thought in terms of this project has been Dr. Lester Agyei McCorn’s book, *Standing on Holy Common Ground*. In this

⁹Robert McAfee Brown, *An Introduction to Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 50.

work McCorn merges two philosophies, liberation theology and community development to bring about reconciliation and restoration to an otherwise oppressed community. In this book McCorn says, “My purpose for writing this book is to address the ongoing disconnect between the Black church and the African American community, especially as it relates to neighborhood deterioration which adversely effects both institutions.”¹⁰ In this work McCorn does a masterful job of showing the limitless possibilities that can occur when the church and community collaborate.

Beating the Odds: Raising Academically Successful African American Males, written by Freeman A. Hrabowski, III, Kenneth L. Maton and Geoffrey L. Greif explores the factors that make African American young men successful. It considers the young males relationship with his mother, father and family as a whole. Freeman Hrabowski has done a considerable amount of work in this area. He is the president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County and a champion of African American young men. Many insights from this book were used to set help establish the context for this work.

Black Males; An African American View on Raising Young Men, written by Harvey Alston talks about the components that are essential to building healthy young African American males. He discusses the role of parents in raising our young men. He gives examples of some of the major mistakes that parents make in raising you men and some solutions to improving our parenting skills. Alston suggests that in order to be successful in raising our young men, we must have a systematic plan for doing so.

One of the premiere African American Authors for the topic of Black youth is Jawanza Kunjufu. Used in this work for consideration, was his book *Motivating and*

¹⁰Lester Agyei McCorn, *Standing on Holy Common Ground* (Chicago, IL: MMGI Books, 2013), 14.

Preparing Black Youth for Success. In this work he explores the issue of talent being considered as a career. He also spends a great deal of time considering the components needed to become economically self-sufficient. Kunjufu also explores what is needed to cultivate a desire and motivation for success within our young African American males. One of the assertions that he makes is that values must create a foundation for motivation. It would be very difficult to develop this project without consulting Kwanza Kunjufu; he is one of the preeminent scholars in the area of Black youth and culture.

Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys written by Jawanza Kunjufu was also very helpful in the creation of this document. In this book Kunjufu takes African American males through the various stages of the life cycle. He gives suggestions as to how the potholes that young men typically face can be navigated. He delves into the issues of self-respect and accountability and how these two have an enormous effect on the overall make up of what our young men will become. He also addresses the issue of combating peer pressure and developing the inner fortitude of our young men to withstand those challenges.

Amos N. Wilson, in the book, *The Developmental Psychology of The Black Child*, shares concepts that help to shape children even before they are born. The author talks about the diet of the mother that carries the child and how that affects the brain and the children's ability to learn.¹¹

Paul Hill Jr., in the book *Coming of Age: African American Male Rites-of-Passage*, explores an important aspect of coming of age; this book examines how the

¹¹Amos N. Wilson, *The Developmental Psychology of the Black Child* (New York, NY: Africana Research Publications, 1978).

Black community can institutionalize rites of passage as part of the child-rearing process.¹²

Chris McNair, in the book *Young Lions: Christian Rites-of-Passage for African American Young Men*, introduces and supports a mentoring program that offers African American young men positive peer group involvement, hands-on skill development, knowledge of the African American culture, and relationships with Christian African American men as role models. This resource provides the tools and encouragement needed to help leaders of African American young men experience the joy of supporting and challenging youth to grow as Christ's disciples. It includes practical tips for getting started, a comprehensive leadership recruitment and training plan, complete meeting outlines and directions, reproducible pages for participants, and an interaction-oriented mentor's guide.¹³

Useni Eugene Perkin, in the book *Harvesting New Generations: The Positive Development of Black Youth* offers a comprehensive exposition on Black youth. This study provides a careful analysis of their problems; personal, societal, and institutional, as well as potential solutions for the future.¹⁴

Garrott Benjamin, in the book *Boys to Men: A Handbook for Survival* proposes a resource for the young, middle-aged and very mature, which are looking for answers, and

¹²Paul Hill Jr., *Coming of Age: African American Male Rites-of-Passage* (Chicago, IL: African AmericanImages, 1992).

¹³Chris McNair, *Young Lions: Christian Rites of Passage for African American Young Men* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001).

¹⁴U. E. Perkins, *Harvesting New Generations: The Positive Development of Black Youth* (Chicago, IL: Third World Press, 1986).

helping others find answers that make sense on the tedious journey of making the transition from boys to men.¹⁵

Lathardus Goggins II, in the book *African Centered Rites-of-Passage and Education*, discusses the correlation between one's self-conception and one's academic performance. This book explains African-centered rites and the rituals and ceremonies behind them.¹⁶

Bret Stephenson, in the book *From Boys to Men: Spiritual Rites-of-Passage in an Indulgent Age*, provides a guide to restoring the successful models used by ancient cultures the world over to raise adolescent boys. It explains the negative effects of Western youth culture and how it can be transformed. It offers instructions for integrating basic rites of passage into modern family life and youth programs. For tens of thousands of years, all across the globe, societies have been coping with raising adolescents. Why is it then that native cultures never had the need for juvenile halls, residential treatment centers, mood-altering drugs, or boot camps? How did they avoid the high incidence of teen violence America is experiencing, and how did they prevent their youth from relying on drugs and alcohol, the use of which has become so prevalent in Western society?¹⁷

In *From Boys to Men*, Bret Stephenson shows readers that older cultures did not magically avoid adolescence; instead, they developed successful rituals and rites of passage for sculpting teen boys into healthy young men. From Aleutian Eskimos to Polynesian Islanders, from tribal Africans to Australian Aborigines, each culture found

¹⁵T. G. Benjamin, *Boys to Men* (Indianapolis, IN: Heaven on Earth Publishing House, 1993).

¹⁶Lathardus Goggins II, *African Centered Rites of Passage and Education* (Chicago, IL: African American Images, 1996).

¹⁷Bret Stephenson, *From Boys to Men: Spiritual Rites of Passage in an Indulgent Age* (Rochester, NY: Park Street Press, 2006).

archetypal ways to initiate their boys into the adult community. Stephenson explains the basics of rites-of-passage and offers insight into how to reintroduce these successful practices and traditional understandings into modern family life and programs for youth. He discusses the damaging effects of our youth culture and the negative teen products that are fueled by corporate America and reveals how we can counteract these negative forces by using meaningful rites-of-passage to create a society with happy and healthy adolescent boys.¹⁸

Louise Carus Mahdi, in the text *Crossroads: The Quest for Contemporary Rites-of-Passage*, highlights how thinkers and activists from many orientations and traditions are coming together to explore ways to reconstitute rites of passage as a form of community healing for our public and personal ills. *Crossroads* is a comprehensive collection of over fifty cutting-edge writings on diverse aspects of the transition to adulthood.¹⁹

Marilyn Maye, *Orita: Rite-of-passage for Youth of African descent in America*, is a guide for parents seeking to design a Rite-of-passage program for their adolescent youth and for parents considering such a program. *Orita* (meaning crossroads) prepares participants for adulthood by teaching life management skills in the context of African heritage and biblical principles. At the *Orita* celebration, family and community honor their youth and acknowledge their transition into adulthood. Parents are guided through

¹⁸Louise Carus Mahdi, Nancy Geyer Christopher, and Michael Meade, eds. *Crossroads: The Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1996).

¹⁹Mahdi, Christopher, & Meade, *Crossroads*.

every aspect of the design and planning of a program tailored for their youth. The program is also flexible and can be applied to families of various cultures.²⁰

Haki R. Madhubuti, *Black Men, Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?: The Afrikan American Family in Transition*, is the seminal and critical work that helped solidify Haki Madhubuti as an informed, passionate, and caring commentator on Black life, culture, relationships, and the development and stability of the Black community. *Black Men* is an integral text for anyone with vested interest in building healthy, thriving Black families and communities. Madhubuti takes aim at some of the critical issues facing the African American family. He offers useful, pointed, practical solutions for overcoming these obstacles and challenges.²¹

Joseph L. White and James H. Cones III, write *Black Man Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*. They ask the question that in the face of centuries of institutional and interpersonal racism, in the light of the signals they receive from society, and given the choices they must make about what they want from life and how to go about getting it, how can Black men in America realize their full potential?

This work is a psychological and social portrait that reflects their personal views on the struggle of Black men against oppression and for self-determination. Using numerous case histories and biographical sketches of Black men who have failed and those who have prevailed, the authors describe strategies for responding to racism and entrenched power—underscoring the healing capacity of religion, family, Black

²⁰Marilyn Maye, *Orita: Rites of passage for youth of African descent in America* (New York, NY: Faith Works, 2000).

²¹Haki R. Madhubuti, *Black Men, Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?: The Afrikan American Family in Transition* (Chicago, IL: Third World Press, 1990).

consciousness movements, mentorships, educational programs, paid employment, and other positive forces. They also explore the concept of identity as it applies to being Black and male and the influence of Black men on American culture.²²

Neenga Warfield-Coppock, *Afrocentric Theory and Applications: Adolescent Rites-of-Passage*, refers romantically and inaccurately to Africa, unlike most Rites-of-Passage books, this one is rooted in real experience and practical application and genuine knowledge of African cultural values. This is the book for people that are committed to thinking critically and developing programs that truly impact children, not just trying to put something together because the school or church needs time to fill up.²³

Nathan Hare and Julia Hare, *Bringing the Black Boy to Manhood: The Passage*, bringing the Black Boy to Manhood issued the call and was the catalyst for the rites of passage movement for African-American boys. The late psychologist, Asa Hilliard, called it: “A unique and indispensable contribution...a superior roadmap.” Praised by respected educators such as Jawanza Kunjufu, author of *Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys* and Maulana Karenga, who wrote the book, *Introduction to Black Studies* and created Kwanzaa, *Bringing the Black Boy to Manhood* is “a needed and creative approach” that “can become as meaningful to Black people as Kwanzaa” (in the

²²Joseph L. White and James H. Cone, *Black Man Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999).

²³Neenga Warfield-Coppock, *Afrocentric Theory and Applications: Adolescent Rites of Passage* (Washington, DC: Baobab Associates, Inc., 1990).

observation of Prof. Oba Tshaka), based on his decades on the founding leadership of NBUF (the National Black United Front).²⁴

William Grier and Price M. Cobbs, in *Black Rage*, examine the full range of Black lives from the vantage point of psychiatry; this widely acclaimed work has established itself as the classic statement of the desperation, conflicts, and anger of Black life in America today. *Black Rage* tells of the insidious effects of the heritage of slavery; describes love, marriage, and the family; addresses the sexual myths and fears of Blacks and whites; chronicles how the schools fail the Black child; examines mental illness among Black people and the psychic stresses engendered by discrimination; and, finally, focuses on the miasma of racial hatred that envelops this country, why it exists, and what will surely happen if it is not soon dispelled.²⁵

Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacies of African-American Families*, is the companion to *Black Families in White America* (1968), sociologist Billingsley addresses the strengths and weaknesses of African American families, concluding that their strengths are “by far more powerful and contain the seeds of their survival and rejuvenation.” Drawing on many studies and using numerous charts, the author first discusses African American family structure, then goes on to consider the legacy from Africa, family patterns during slavery and after, and the rise and fall of the Black working class. Stressing the African American family's adaptability, he shows how the extended family, as well as community institutions, can serve as stepping-stones to

²⁴Nathan Hare and Julia Hare, *Bringing the Black Boy to Manhood: The Passage* (San Francisco, CA: Black Think Tank, 1985).

²⁵William Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1968).

success. The Black church, self-help, and government, he writes, can all play a part in bolstering the African American family. Although Billingsley argues that forces in society lead to single-parent families, he glosses over the epidemic of teenage pregnancy.

Coming of Age, written by Paul Hill, Jr. constructs an African American Male Rites of Passage. He makes reference to the Jewish system of rites of passage and illuminates some characteristics of their culture that would be beneficial to our young African American males. America has always defined the male role as that of protector and provider, but for a number of reasons, the African American male is frequently incapable of playing that role. While he may understand that racism is frequently the cause of his failure, the African American male's structural inability to play his role can take a psychological toll and may lead to violence.

It is clear that the eradication of these forces or their neutralization, will require a radical rearrangement of societal institutions with corresponding change at the very core of America's value system. This need for change will call for protracted struggle, as those whose vested interest are secured through maintaining the devalued status of African American males will not voluntarily give up their privileged positions. It is with this understanding that the war to undergird our African American young men must be fought at all cost.

In terms of methodology, no other work has impacted this project more than the book *Empowering African American Males to Succeed* written by Mychal Wynn. In this book Wynn provides an inside look at his ten step approach for parents and teachers. Wynn asserts, "The African American male is an endangered species. The latest census bureau figures show that African American males have higher unemployment rates;

lower high school graduation rates; while ranking first in incarceration and homicide as a percentage of the population.

The leading cause of death for African American men between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four is homicide. While representing only 6 percent of the population, African American men represent a whopping 49 percent of prison inmates. Only 4 percent of African American males attend college, while 23 percent of those that are college age are either incarcerated, on probation, or in prison. While African American children nationwide comprise approximately 17 percent of all children in public schools, they represent 41 percent of all children in special education. Of the African American Children in special education, 85 percent of them are African American males. African American males, while comprising only 8 percent of public school students, represent the largest percentage, nationally, in suspensions.”²⁶

Although our community has become increasingly frustrated over our schools in ability to educate African American urban children, particularly our young men, we differ greatly in our opinions about such programs that separate our young men from the mainstream student body. Many believe that we should provide better training for our parents and teachers. Yet others believe that better leadership in our schools systems will ensure that our young men are afforded a quality education in a supportive learning environment without separating them from the mainstream.

Regardless of the strategy we choose to employ, we must first agree that something needs to be done. If we want our young men to achieve a valuable and respectable place in society, we must empower them to think and to do for themselves in

²⁶Mychal Wynn, *Empowering African American Males to Succeed* (Marietta, GA: Rising Sun Publishing, 1992), xi.

ways that are morally sound and socially acceptable. If we want to increase the numbers of our young men enrolling in college, starting businesses, developing solid African American families, and rebuilding our communities, then we must empower them to make life saving decisions. If we want to decrease the numbers of our young men entering prisons, being placed upon the rosters of the hopeless and homeless, and losing their lives on the urban battlefields of America, they must become empowered to believe that they can take charge of their lives and control their destinies.

In this book, Wynn provides a solid program as to how our young boys can be educated and set on the right path to wholeness and mental health. He gives a ten-step approach in that he refers to as Blocks. One could look this as building blocks to building a healthy, stable and productive African American male. In laying the first block, *Cultural Understanding*, he examines the cultural commonality and cultural uniqueness of African American males.

The first block of cultural understanding is usually the most difficult to develop. Expanding our cultural understanding of our young men will enable us to gain a greater awareness of the *why* behind behavioral characteristics and how certain behaviors are interwoven within the culture. Without understanding what conflicts and issues they are being confronted with daily in their homes and along the streets of their communities, we cannot develop a curriculum that is relevant to life as they see it. One of the instructional breakdowns in urban schools is relating discussions about African American history and the achievements of African American men to the current conflicts and issues confronting them.

The ongoing discussions of the vision and philosophies of such African American men as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, W. E. B. Dubois, Booker T. Washington, and Carter G. Woodson can provide our young men with a foundation from which to develop an understanding of the many issues that have led to the crisis within our communities. From this idea they can begin to develop ideas and survival skills that will help them to place the daily life-threatening confrontations which they are experiencing in our communities and American society into a perspective that will allow them to make the necessary lifesaving decisions.

The second building block that Wynn develops is *Mutual Respect and Character Building*. During this discussion Wynn says, “The magnitude and complexities of the problems confronting our young men require that we take a holistic approach to teaching and raising them. This approach requires us to study and teach the total person. We must build character and develop the intangibles of diligence, determination, and dedication to purpose, fortitude, perseverance, compassion, respect for self, and respect for the property and rights of others. Developing leadership skills and instilling a code of conduct are as important as, and are essential to, any academic study.”²⁷

Out of this the inference can be drawn that our young men must be taught of their responsibilities to themselves, their families, and their communities and held accountable for their actions. They must be taught self-respect for other people and their property. We must develop our home, community, church and school environments to develop, encourage, and nurture these skills and to develop the character of our young men. We must encourage a standard of behavior and code of conduct and not allow disrespectful and ill-mannered behavior in the classroom or at home. We must instill in our young men

²⁷Ibid., 21.

a code of conduct that starts at home and reaches beyond, into our churches, schools and wider community. A concerted effort has to be made to reinforce these attributes until they become habit and our young African American brothers are transformed.

The third building block that Wynn considers is *Personal Responsibility*. Young men do not benefit from our excusing irresponsible, ill-mannered, and disrespectful behavior. It is our responsibility as educators and concerned citizens to teach our young men responsibilities and to hold them accountable for their actions. To prepare our boys to become men, we must not only demand they accept responsibilities, but that they accept them fully. We must demand that they not only do their jobs and perform their chores but that they do them well. Helping them assume personal responsibilities builds self-esteem. It prepares them for the future. It gives them pride and self-respect.

Wynn says, “We must establish and maintain regular dialogue with our young men in all areas of responsibility (e.g., sex, drugs, religion, gangs, pregnancy, destruction of property, etc.). Although, religion, prayer, and worship of God is not taught in our public schools, parents must assume the responsibility of helping our young men to develop a solid religious foundation. Our young men cannot be sufficiently empowered to deal with the complexities of the problems confronting African-American men without a solid religious foundation. The lifesaving decisions that they must make in their lives must be guided spiritually and morally. Our schools, businesses, churches, and the community at large, must assume a leadership role and provide clear examples of accepting responsibility for ourselves.”²⁸

Our young men must be taught how to develop philosophies of living; the personal rules that we apply to how we live our lives; how we deal with problems and

²⁸Ibid., 40.

conflicts in our lives. The concepts of diligence, determination, perseverance, fortitude, integrity, and accepting responsibility for ones actions must regularly be discussed and taught. Much of what our young men see in the movies and read in magazines glamorize criminals, drugs and alcohol abuse. Our young men are constantly being exposed to media that promotes violence as the solution to resolving interpersonal conflict.

The fourth building block that Wynn discusses is *Teacher and Parent Expectations*, he says, “Teacher and parent expectations represents the single most important building block in our young men seeking and education that prepares them to achieve excellence and empowers them to develop solutions to the many conflicts confronting them in their lives. We know that the system is not working because of the disproportionate number of Black children who are labeled mentally retarded and placed in special classes.

We know that the system is not working because of the disproportionate number of Black children who are being suspended, expelled, and pushed out of schools. Since teachers of Black children are often viewed as incapable of success, they tend to perform at low levels and internalize negative feelings. For Black children, as is the case with other minority children usually possessing values differing from those of their teachers, little of what the teachers say or the attitudes instilled are considered related to their life style out of school.”²⁹

We must raise our expectations of our young men to greater levels of achievement in all the areas that we have previously discussed. We must consistently communicate our expectations of excellence; that we not only believe that they are capable, but that we expect them to excel. We must establish and reinforce their personal

²⁹Ibid., 43.

responsibilities, character and behavior in a manner consistent with our expectations of exceptional goal achievement. We must begin to look at, speak to, and encourage our young men in a way that communicates we believe that they are capable of owning businesses and rebuilding their communities; that we expect them to take responsibility for, and ownership of, their lives and their communities.

The fifth building block that Wynn discusses is *Focus and Identifying Goals*. The scope and magnitude of a person's goals is rooted in their experience, self-confidence and faith. When one has experienced the thrill of victory, the satisfaction and adulation of extraordinary achievement, or the praise and acknowledgment that accompanies winning, one has an undeniable advantage over those who have never had such experience. Setting and achieving smaller goals gives a person confidence in their ability to set and to achieve larger goals.

Many of our young men have never experienced winning. The emotional uplifting of having people pat you on the back and congratulate you on being the best and the personal sense of joy and fulfillment of having set a goal and achieved it. They do not have a family tradition of extraordinary achievement. They may live in communities where people do not feel empowered to control their situations and define their futures. We must take our young men as they are, with whatever dreams they have, and help them to experience daily success in the things they enjoy. We can take their ordinary goals and redefine them in extraordinary terms. With the deck already stacked against our young men, we cannot allow anyone to discourage them from setting extraordinary goals for themselves.

Have we forgotten how many in our community are first generation college graduates? Our mothers and fathers constantly encouraged us to do what they did not have the opportunity to do. Have we forgotten that certain people thought that we were incapable of college level study that we were strong but could never become studious that we could plow the land but that we could never own the land?

Our men studied and taught themselves to read when it was forbidden and life threatening to do so. Our men stood and spoke out against the treatment of African Americans when they were surely signing their death warrants to do so. Have we forgotten that the slave masters felt and believed that life for Blacks outside of slavery would be impossible?

Have we forgotten that behavioral scientists were quite convinced that the Negro mind was limited genetically in the scope of its comprehension? Have we forgotten that there was a time when it was unthinkable that a Black man could build a multi-million dollar business, become a doctor, break the chains of slavery, or make a serious challenge for the presidency of the United States of America? After enduring what we have endured in this society, there are no goals that are unachievable! Who are we to determine which of our young men is capable of extraordinary achievement? How dare we establish goals that are limited in scope because we do not believe that our young men are capable?

Block six that Wynn discusses is *Visualization*. Visualization is significant because it deals with the concept of seeing something before it has physically manifested itself. Many of our young men do not make it out of the ghettos of America. They never make it because they do not see the opportunities available to them. They never overcome their sense of hopelessness and despair because they cannot see themselves

getting there. To help our young men visualize achievement we must help them experience success.

Herein lies the problem for many of our parents and teachers. Many of parents and teachers have become frustrated. We continue to keep our expectations high. If we can get them to visualize getting straight A's or becoming a great author, doctor, lawyer, educator, or businessman, we can help them to experience the smaller goals leading to achieving the extraordinary goals. By helping our young men to visualize straight A's, we can focus their energies on achieving the smaller goal of getting one A. By helping a young man visualize becoming a great author, we can focus his energy on the smaller goal of reading one book. When our young men are visualizing climbing to the mountaintop, the smaller steps of climbing are not nearly as intimidating.

The seventh Block that Wynn speaks of is that of *Affirmation*. He says, "In many African-American churches we were taught the biblical principle that there is life-giving power in the tongue."³⁰ This means that we can affirm success or we can affirm failure by what we say. Our children, particularly our young men, often say negative and discouraging things to each other. In many homes, siblings say more discouraging things to each other than positive and encouraging things.

The media highlights many more negative things pertaining to our young men than they do their positive achievements and potential. Our young men must be given words that have life giving power. We must familiarize them with such words as diligence, determination, perseverance, brilliance, beautiful, incredible, wonderful, magnificence, extraordinary, etc. Too often others and we are guilty of referring to our young men as lazy, stupid, ugly, dumb and ignorant. When angry, or disappointed, others

³⁰Ibid., 67.

and we have said such things to our young men as, “you make me sick; I cannot stand you; why do you act so stupid; or you look like a fool? Words like this affirm failure and defeat. They destroy the spirit and self-esteem. These words have no life giving power in them and have no place in our vocabulary.

The next block that Wynn deals with is a *Passion for Excellence*. We know that many of our young men suffer from low self-esteem and feel powerless to change their situations. Yet we know our young men to be verbally and physically aggressive with tremendous energy levels. We are a very high-energy and passionate people from our music to our dance to our tremendous oratory.

Our young men, who have proven to be extraordinarily competitive, will begin to develop a passion for excellence as we harness and focus their energy on goal achievement. Our young men must be taught to walk tall, stand strong, and speak clearly. Their handshakes must be strong and confident. We must teach them to speak with confidence and conviction. We must encourage them to excel by raising their own expectations.

A quest for excellence means that it is unacceptable for any student to fail. If any student fails, it must not be because we have failed them. A quest for excellence means that every parent and teacher should marvel at the pride, confidence, self-assurance, and dignity displayed by their sons and students. When we look into the mirror of our community, we see our own reflection.

The last and final building block that Wynn speaks of is *Empowerment*. As we plant the seeds of empowerment, we will give birth to the spirit of entrepreneurship, and a spirit of confidence and pride in doing for yourself. A spirit that must become

embedded within the consciousness of our young men if the true emancipation of the African-American community in general, and the African American male in particular, is to come about.

Empowerment through emancipation must break the chains that have bound our young men into believing themselves powerless and their situations hopeless. To maintain an empowered consciousness in our young men, we must empower their minds through reading, and diligent study. Our young men should be reading, writing, and speaking about the richness of our heritage and developing visions of our future. This empowered consciousness will enable our young men to become men of thought; men of action; men of conviction; men of purpose; men of principle; men of strength; and men of courage.

To empower our young men is to harness their tremendous energy so that they grow mentally, as well as in stature. Through our guidance, our young men will become sufficiently empowered to make life-saving decisions to avoid drugs, to turn away from crime and violence, and to denounce the lure of street gangs. We must help our young men to see the extraordinary potential in their lives and to develop confidence and self-assurance.

Perhaps they will begin to overcome the darkness and despair of our inner cities with vision and the hope of excellence. It is a powerful thing to touch someone's life; to know that you have said or done something that has helped them to become a better person. Wynn's work was relied on thoroughly to develop a methodological structure for this project.

CHAPTER THREE

FOUNDATIONS

Biblical Foundation

The overarching theme of this paper is Community and Economic Development as it pertains to the African American church community. The specific topic of this work is mentoring at risk youth, specifically as it pertains to the African American male. It has always been the writer's contention that it is impossible to have authentic church in the absence of the community in which the church resides. In other words, the church and community must be one. In this work, the writer will give a biblical foundation for such work. Christ was always concerned about the left out, the marginalized, the poor and those that were just plain in need. In this paper the writer will attempt to build biblical support from both the Old and New Testaments to show his intent as to how the Church should conduct itself in light of the community in which it rests.

Old Testament

The book of Isaiah will provide the Old Testament backdrop for this argument. Isaiah writes to a people that had turned from what God had taught them. To him praying and fasting were null and void without obedience to God and good deeds that extend beyond one's immediate family. Isaiah's constant message expressed repentance and acknowledgement of sin so that one could be reconciled back to God. The basis for our discussion will be the Isaiah 58:1-14.

Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. ‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’

Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?

Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

“If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken (Is 58:1-14).

An announcement of the sins of God’s people is compared to a trumpeter using a ram’s horn, raising the alarm of impending danger (58:1). An inventory of sins, however, does not immediately follow the command to announce them (cf. Joel 2:15, where the sound of the ram’s horn announces a fast).¹

¹*Believers Church Bible Commentary: Isaiah* (Harrisburg, VA: Herald Press, 2002), Logos Electronic Edition.

What appears to be a register of the people's faithfulness is stated in the next three stanzas (58:2ab, 2c–3a, 3b–4). They seek the Lord (58:2ab). The NRSV and NIV understand the text as irony and add *as if they were a nation (as a nation, Heb)*. practicing justice. The NIV also adds that *they seem eager (they are eager, Heb)*. It is not necessary to read into this stanza an accusation of hypocrisy against the people. Rather, the prophet sketches a picture of the people honestly seeking to know God's ways, oblivious to their own rebellion (58:3a).²

“Cry aloud, and spare not. Lift up your voice and show the house of Jacob their sins”³ This is a great example of one of the critiques of the present day church. There are many that feel that the church has divorced herself from many of the ills that plague the community.

Church leadership's responsibility is to speak out against that which plagues its constituency. The people must be mobilized in a way that will promote the uplift of the community. This is in a large part the role of the pastor to not just see a need but to provide a vehicle by which the need can on a consistent basis be addressed. It is also being inferred in this chapter that the leadership of the church should lead the way in terms of not just identifying problem areas but in terms of solutions as well.

In her polemic work *The New Jim Crow*, written by Michelle Alexander, the writer makes the inference that middle class African Americans have turned their back on their communities, however the truth is that in many ways the church has fallen short as

²Ibid.

³Cain Hope Felder, *The Original African Heritage Study Bible* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), 1065.

well⁴ In essence if there is a need in the community the church must put itself in a position to provide a solution.

The truth is that in the African American community you really do not have to look far because many of the same problems have been plaguing us for years. Problems such as single parent households, poor education, poverty, and an unfair criminal justice system are just several of the examples that that pervade our communities to this day. The sad fact is that many of the problems that plague the community can be traced back to an educational system that in many ways has failed us.

When you consider the enormous amount of Black men that are incarcerated, the majority has not had access to an adequate education. When there is an absence of a proper education you will find poverty, crime and a host of other problems that will tend to cripple the community. So Isaiah's writing is correct in this sense that if we must we should go the distance to make sure that things are better for our children and for the people that we are called to serve.

As Michelle Alexander points out in her book, many African Americans have gotten to a place where they are comfortable and have developed a mentality that says, "I've got mine and they have got to get theirs." However, the reality is that if it had not been for others before us none of us would be in the position that we find ourselves today. The truth is that none of us will be free until all of us are free.

The Israelites are eager, they inquire, and they long for God's nearness (58:2c–3a). The reality of their rebellion surfaces quite innocently, it seems, in a set of parallel questions formed as a complaint addressed to God: "Why do we fast, but you do not see?"

⁴Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010), 12.

Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” So when Isaiah speaks in verse 2 of showing the people their transgressions, this speaks not just to the majority culture, but those of us that may be the object of this injustice also has a responsibility.

We must speak out to the powers that be. Whether it is our politicians, school officials or whoever, we must move forward in an organized way in order that they would see that we mean business and are seeking results. In an organized way we must prioritize our ambitions and asked for results in this great nation that we support with our taxes.

In verse 2 of God is really painting an effective picture of paradox in that the people sought to know His ways but the inference is made that they had no intention of practicing His ways. One of the major problems with the church has been that we are effective in our Sunday rituals but seem to be lost in what God has called us to in terms of service during the week.

Inner city churches are full on Sunday yet it seems that many are left so bruised on Monday through Saturday that they do not have the strength to make it to the house of God. Is it possible that the church has gotten to a place where we have learned to perfect church, but have missed the mark in terms of God’s intended plan for us”?

In many of our churches it can be easily identified that one of the most missing demographics is that of our men. For some reason our men seem to be missing from the church in alarming numbers. African American men have become very skeptical of the church. The truth is that they are in a daily struggle to survive. Whether we want to face it or not they are still at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Still the last hired and first fired. They are still falling through the cracks of our educational system.

The numbers have not changed much over the decades; there are still more African American brothers in prison than they are in college. As an African American people need to pay more attention to what is plaguing the community; we should not let the majority culture off of the hook.

Isaiah is speaking to a Nation that has seemingly turned from God. In like manner there are some things that our nation, our government needs to acknowledge. While Jim Crow and many of the laws that were in place to keep Blacks down no longer exist, Blacks are still disadvantaged socio-economically, educationally and lack the necessary provision to compete and live a decent existence.

The great African American theologian James Cone, in his book, *Black Theology Black Power* writes, “For them to know why Blacks loot and riot at what seems slight provocation. Therefore, they must have reports to explain the disenchantment of Blacks with white democracy, so they can be surprised. They must believe that Blacks are in poverty because they are lazy or because they are inferior.”⁵ He writes, this to show that those in power must be able to justify their actions in terms of African Americans so that they can continue their heinous injustices. The reality is that there is not an issue in terms of laziness but there is an issue in terms of equality. People can talk about African Americans as being lazy when we have spent 400 years giving free labor with no compensation in building this country.

⁵James Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2010, 12th Printing).

Should not God at least observe with appreciation the *form* that piety takes? No doubt the form that piety takes *is* noticed on high. But in God's design, form and substance belong together (53:b).⁶

The separation of form and substance lies at the center of God's accusation (58:3b–4). The accusation opens with the interjection *hen* (*Look*, NRSV; *Behold*, RSV), calling the people to attention. The pursuit of self-interest lies in the exploitation of *workers*. The Hebrew word for workers is *'ašabim*, *sufferers*. Workers are exploited even as those who own the material capital exhibit a piety separated from justice and righteousness. The same interjection (*hen*) continues the accusation, giving additional detail to this bogus piety. It is not clear whether fasting in which *quarreling and strife* (NIV) occur is internecine (among the owners) or directed by the owners to the workers, creating and extending their suffering. In any case, God does not sanction such quarrelsome behavior.⁷

Three rhetorical questions dominate the next stanza (58:5). The first two are clearly rhetorical; this means that the answer (No!) is already implied in the question. At issue is self-denial as an end in itself rather than as a means toward an end. Fasting as a means of calling attention primarily to the form of piety (*to humble oneself*) fails to address the substance of piety. The second question develops the theme of form to include three recognizable acts of piety: bowing down, wearing sackcloth, and applying ashes. Each of these calls attention to form and, by itself, does not meet the standard of

⁶*Believers Church Bible Commentary: Isaiah*

⁷*Ibid.*

fasting chosen by the Lord. The third question employs sarcasm, again calling into question fasting centered on form.⁸

A new rhetorical question, this one inviting a positive response, is now put forward (58:6). The question begins on the first line and continues with a sequence of three infinitive clauses stating liberation from social oppression on lines two through four (*to loose, to undo, to let go free*). The various translations usually include the last line of the stanza (*and to break every yoke*) as part of the sequence, although its form is different in the Hebrew text. The stanza as a whole declares the soul of bona fide piety to be in implementing God's just order. What characterizes genuine fasting is not the pursuit of self-interest, but concern for the well-being of others.⁹

Another rhetorical question inviting a positive response begins the next segment (58:7). The specifics of liberation now emerge as caring for the impoverished and the destitute. The poor are not strangers and aliens but *your own kin*. Fasting as a spiritual resource for a social ethic that addresses the problems of poverty lies at the center of God's intention for his people.

Two uses of an adverb of time (*then*), signifying a fulfillment of the rhetorical question in 58:7, conclude the segment (58:8–9a). The first sign of this fulfillment comes in four parallel phrases (*your light, your healing, your righteousness, and your rear guard*, NIV), each phrase linked to a promise (58:8).

Your light refers to the clarity of insight that fasting is a spiritual resource for social action. This clarity rests on the authority of the speaker (the Lord) and not merely on human insight. *Your healing* indicates restoration of social health as an

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

accompaniment of spiritual healing. *Your righteousness* (*vindication*, NRSV note) means right behavior as the vanguard of God's people. *Your rear guard* is none other than the Lord's glory itself, guarantee of safety and security. God is in the front and at the back, protecting the one who seeks him.

God has the people to know what they should be fasting for and how they should conduct themselves. He has them to know that they should be concerned with the hungry and giving to the poor. He tells them, it is not good enough looking at the naked, but they should be concerned with clothing them as well. The inference is made in these verses that what the children of Israel were praying for had nothing to do with the will that God had for them. How interesting it is that today many of us are more concerned with what God is doing for us than what God is doing for others.

It has been said that God's will for us, might not be what we desire for our lives. In other words, we may desire a large house and a fine automobile, yet God's will for our life may be that we are broke, however, people still see us giving God the praise and honor that He is due. God never blesses us for ourselves, but He blesses us ultimately that we would be a blessing to someone else. So in essence, what this passage teaches us is that our prayers should be that God gives us what we need to be a blessing in the lives of others. So as we see needs arise in our community, as church leaders, we need to be praying for the provision necessary to make a difference in the life of those that are left out and marginalized.

The needs of youth in the city of Richmond Virginia are an injustice. This is especially the case for African American young men. The amount of hopelessness, anger

and abandonment young African Americans face requires a great area of prayer and consideration.

Azim Jamal and Harvey Mckinnon discuss in their book, *The Power of Giving*, that there is a certain power that we attain that is released when we give. Jamal and Mckinnon write, “We believe that every human being deserves the opportunity to reach self-actualization and to realize his or her potential. Your giving will help you and many other people come closer to their potential.”¹⁰

They use Maslow’s hierarchy of needs of self-actualization, social needs, security needs and physiological needs. All of these needs are important to all of us if we are to have the proper self-esteem and outlook on life. The base of Maslow’s pyramid starts with our core physiological needs, air, water, food, shelter, warmth, sleep and so on. These are important and the lack of these can render one unstable and unable to function in everyday life. The second level comprises our security needs: protection from the elements, social order, law, and so. These needs are important and give us a sense of security and stability. The level includes our social needs: love, family, relationships, work group, and so on. These are integral as well in terms of producing a person that is emotionally whole. The fourth level consists of our ego needs: achievement, reputation, responsibility, independence, prestige, status, and so on.¹¹

Maslow originally placed self-actualization needs at the top of his five-stage model. These needs were satisfied through personal growth, self-fulfillment, and the resolution of personal potential. Later models placed self-actualization as a seventh stage

¹⁰Azim Jamal & Harvey Mckinnon, *The Power of Giving: How Giving Back Enriches Us All* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2007), 27.

¹¹Ibid.

above two new levels: cognitive needs (cognitive needs, knowledge, meaning and self-awareness) and aesthetic needs (beauty, balance and form). Others have added an eighth and final level: our spiritual needs, achieved through transcendence and helping others to achieve self-actualization.¹²

Maslow believed that needs must be satisfied in the order of the levels he described. He believed that only after a level had been reached could an individual begin to work on meeting the next level of needs. If our basic needs are not met it will be impossible to concentrate in other areas. We can see this in great detail with those who are not children of privilege in our inner cities. It is not prudent to think that children can function academically when they have not eaten. There are many in our inner cities that are not be able to compete because of the impoverished situations that they find themselves in.¹³

The second sign of this fulfillment, also introduced by *then*, comes in the form of the age-old promise of God's presence when his people call on him in their time of need (58:9a).¹⁴

In the NRSV and NIV, the if-clause that opens this segment is taken as a new thought (58:9b–10; note the gap in the text between the two parts of v. 9). It is clear that the removal of the yoke, already mentioned in 58:6, means the yoke of injustice, particularly accusation and slander. The if-clause is completed in 58:10. Now the theme returns to the satisfaction of the hungry. In 58:7 sharing bread with the hungry constitutes a fast acceptable to the Lord. Here offering *yourself* to the hungry constitutes the

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Felder, *The Original African Heritage Bible*, 1066.

appropriate response to God's presence. Satisfying the needs of the oppressed lies alongside this offering. When such selfless giving occurs, God's people experience illumination and the dissipation of gloom.¹⁵

It is no accident that the promise of guidance and restoration follows the forging of the people's spirituality and social consciousness (58:11; cf. Hanson: 207). Guidance, satisfaction of needs, and strength represent blessings, although probably not in order of ascending importance, as Young suggests (1972:424). The pictures of a watered garden and a spring of water portray the prosperity of a people that receives God's guidance. In verse 11 Isaiah speaks of faith. He says in essence that God would guide them continually if they were obedient. He says that he would make a way in a drought and put meat on their bones. He goes on to say that the water that he provides will fail not.

Reconstruction of ruins flows from the Lord's continual guidance (58:12). The *ancient ruins* may refer in general to the results of the Babylonian military campaign in Judah at the beginning of the sixth century BC, when Nebuchadnezzar's army ravaged the land. The titles *Repairer of Broken Walls* and *Restorer of Streets with Dwellings* (NIV) applaud the process of reconstruction.

Isaiah says that God would be a preparer of the breach. In other words, he says that God will fill in the gaps and bring them back together. Because of their obedience and the work they do, future generations would be blessed.¹⁶ Likewise, those of us that have faith must believe that no matter how distressed situations may look, if God guides, He will provide us with the provision necessary. The inference is being made here that after we acknowledge the problem, we must be proactive by participating in the solution.

¹⁵*Believers Church Bible Commentary: Isaiah*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

There are many resources that exist that can assist with the problems that have been discussed. With effort and hard work there are many that can be helped and these predicaments can be improved.

A conditional sentence commending Sabbath keeping stretches over the last two stanzas of the chapter. The first stanza includes three subordinate clauses, each beginning with the conjunction *if* to introduce the conditional sentence (58:13):

If you keep your feet from breaking ...from doing ...
 If you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day ...
 If you honor it by not going ...not doing ... or speaking ... (NIV)

The theme of Sabbath-keeping departs from the chapter's focus on fasting. But the deeper intention of the chapter unites the two themes. At the beginning of the chapter, false piety is fasting alongside exploitation (doing *as you please*, 58:3 NIV). Here at the end of the chapter, true piety is Sabbath-keeping in order to honor the Lord's holy day (not *doing as you please*, 58:13 NIV). Bona fide piety includes spiritual disciplines. These disciplines attest to faith that embraces the form of piety (fasting, Sabbath-keeping) without abandoning the substance of piety (justice).¹⁷

The adverb *then* opens the main clause of the conditional sentence (58:14). Having engaged in the spiritual discipline of Sabbath-keeping, the result is a wondrous relationship with the Lord. The Lord, in turn, honors the discipline and relationship with promises of well-being.¹⁸

These promises echo the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. There, Jacob is described as the Lord's *allotted inheritance* (32:9), that he made to "ride on the heights of the land" (32:13 NIV). Riding on the heights of the land in Isaiah 58 serves as a metaphor

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

of prosperity. Such prosperity cannot be separated from the source of Israel's life, the faith of Jacob. The *inheritance of your father Jacob* (NIV) stands in contrast to the sins of the house of Jacob at the beginning of the chapter. The heritage continues to confront the sin. A final signature, indicating the Lord's authority as speaker, closes the stanza (58:14).¹⁹

New Testament

In Mathew the 25th chapter, Jesus gives us an excellent example of how the church should respond to the community. In verses 31 through 46, Jesus gives the last judgment parable. In this parable, Jesus along with all the holy angels is sitting upon the throne of his glory. In His presence, all the nations of the world will be gathered.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you

¹⁹Ibid.

did not do for me.’ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Mt: 31-46).

Jesus describes his return in verse 31 with imagery that resembles that of 16:27; 19:28; and 24:30. The picture is one of grandeur, majesty, authority, and judgment. The recipients of judgment are all *ta ethnē* (v. 32a), *the peoples* or *the Gentiles* (the nations). Given the use of *ethnē* elsewhere in this discourse, where the Jews apparently are included (24:7, 9, 14), the first translation seems best. But the shift from the neuter *ethnē* to the masculine *autous* (*them*—the people) in verse 32b implies that individuals and not just nations or people groups are intended.²⁰

Here is a picture of all humanity standing before Christ on Judgment Day. No mention is made of those who died before Christ’s return, but it would be natural to view this judgment as the same event as that depicted in 1 Corinthians 15:51–57 and Revelation 20:4, in which all God’s people of every era, including those already dead, are resurrected and/or given their new bodies. Of course, those who have died and gone to be with the Lord will already know their eternal destiny; but here the public, universal, even cosmic demonstration of God’s justice and mercy is displayed for all to see. It is not clear whether or not the wicked dead are present here; Revelation 20:11–15 seem to suggest not.²¹

The separation between *sheep* and *goats* (v. 32) alludes to Ezekiel 34:17–19. Palestinian shepherds frequently had to separate their flocks this way. Sheep and goats freely intermingled and often looked quite similar in appearance, at least from a distance. We too could probably not guess from superficial knowledge and external appearance

²⁰*The New American Commentary: Matthew* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems Inc., 1992), Logos Electronic Library.

²¹*Ibid.*

that are truly God's people, but he knows. "His right [hand]" (v. 33) refers to a place of honor; the left hand, to a place of disgrace (not a third-highest position of honor as in 20:23).²²

Sheep's wool made them more valuable than goats, so naturally Jesus chooses the sheep to represent those individuals who are blessed by God and inherit his kingdom, here envisioned in all its future fullness, though prepared for them from the creation of the world. God intended from the beginning to fashion creatures in community for fellowship with himself. The sheep are blessed because of their good behavior. They cared for Christ, feeding him when he was hungry, giving him drink when thirsty, providing adequate clothing when he was ill-clad (*gymnos*, needed clothes, frequently translated naked but often meaning *only with an undergarment*), showing him hospitality when he was a *foreigner* (*xenos*; stranger, v. 35), and visiting him when he was sick or imprisoned. Here are three basic human needs, apart from salvation—food, shelter, and companionship.²³

The text says that He shall separate them as a shepherd divides his sheep. The inference is made that Jesus will judge them based on their deeds in heaven. The suggestion is also made that those who have been the benefactor of help and those that have been denied help will be witnesses. In other words, we will be judged by our work here on earth. He says that those that have done the work of His Father will be allowed entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven.

In verses 35 and 36, of those who were benefactors of help, "When I was hungry you gave me meat: Thirsty and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger and you took me in:

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

naked and you clothed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison and ye came unto me” (Mt 25:35). The very next verse He tells those that are righteous will be obedient and minister to the people of God and those that are in need.

Many of the sheep are understandably surprised. No doubt several of these conditions did characterize Christ at various stages of his earthly life, but the vast majority of the *righteous* will not have been present then and there to help him. So how did all this happen? Many interpreters have seen this surprise as indicating that these people were *anonymous Christians*—righteous heathen who did good works but never heard the gospel. But the text never says they were surprised to be saved, merely that they did not understand how they had ministered so directly to Jesus.

The King, the Son of Man (cf. vv. 31, 34) replies that these people cared for him whenever they performed acts of mercy for “the least of these brothers of mine.” Here is a major interpretive crux. Who are these brothers? The majority view throughout church history has taken them to be some or all of Christ’s disciples since the word *least* (*elachistōn*) is the superlative form of the adjective *little [ones]* (*mikroi*), which without exception in Matthew refers to the disciples (10:42; 18:6, 10, 14; cf. also 5:19; 11:11), while *brothers* in this Gospel (and usually in the New Testament more generally) when not referring to literal, biological siblings, always means *spiritual kin* (5:22–24, 47; 7:3–5; 12:48–50; 18:15 (2×), 21, 35; 23:8; 28:10).

There may be a theological sense in which all humans are brothers and God’s children, though not all are redeemed, but nothing of that appears here or, with this terminology, elsewhere in Matthew. The minority view throughout church history, which is probably a majority view today, especially in churches with a healthy social ethic, is

that these brothers are any needy people in the world. Thus the passage becomes a strong call to demonstrate “fruit in keeping with repentance” (3:8). Though one need not see any works-righteousness ethic present, many have read the text precisely that way.⁹² Yet while there is ample teaching in many parts of Scripture on the need to help all the poor of the world (most notably in Amos, Micah, Luke, and James), it is highly unlikely that this is Jesus’ point here. Rather, his thought will closely parallel that of 10:42.

The sheep are people whose works demonstrate that they have responded properly to Christ’s messengers and therefore to his message, however humble the situation or actions of those involved. That itinerant Christian missionaries regularly suffered in these ways and were in frequent need of such help is classically illustrated with the example of Paul (see esp. 2 Cor 11:23–27) and the teaching of the *Didache* (ca. a.d. 95).²⁴

The scenario repeats itself with the goats. These are people doomed to eternal punishment. As the kingdom was prepared, so also was the fire. But it is interesting that the fire was not prepared for the goats but for the rebellious angels. Neither is it prepared “from the creation of the world” (v. 34). These differences support a sublapsarian theology, in which God originally made no provision for lost people or hell in his creative purposes, but once humans and angels freely chose to rebel, then a place of punishment was prepared. No Scripture ever indicates that the fallen angels had any subsequent chance to repent. But people do. So no one need join the demons in this fire. Still, some will opt for hell by rejecting Christ. When they do, they have no one but themselves to blame.

²⁴Ibid.

The goats ask the same kind of question as the sheep did, and Jesus offers a parallel reply. These people are condemned for sins of omission as well as commission. Improper response to Christian witnesses leads to damnation.

The closing verse in Jesus' discourse recapitulates both halves of the Judgment Day scene. The parallel between eternal punishment and eternal life makes it difficult to see in the former any kind of annihilationism, even if the word eternal can refer to a qualitative rather than quantitative attribute of life and attractive as doctrines of conditional immortality ought to be to anyone with a sensitive heart.

The upshot here, then, as with the culmination of all Scripture in Revelation 20–22, is to assert that ultimately there will only be two kinds of people in the world. These will be distinguished on the basis of their response to the gospel and its emissaries, and their eternal destinies will be as distinct as is conceivable. True, everlasting reality is not to be found in this life but in the life to come. Hence, there remains no more pressing priority in this life than to respond properly to Jesus and his messengers by becoming disciples through faith in him. Then we must demonstrate Christ's lordship in our lives through acts of service—to all the needy, yes, but especially to those of the household of faith (cf. Gal 6:10). What is more, picturing Christian witnesses as needy and suffering reminds us of the lot true believers often face. This is graphically seen in the Two-Thirds World today where some estimates suggest that over two hundred million Christians suffer malnourishment daily.

In verse 46, He says that those that do not minister to His people and live the life that has no care for the needs of others will be placed in an everlasting punishment and those who are obedient will receive the gift of eternal life.²⁵

Forty to Fifty years ago, the church had a heavy social justice emphasis. However, recently a new phenomenon has arisen known as community development. Community development can be viewed as modern day social justice. In the past, churches and entire communities would mobilize together and create a movement where the needs of the people were being met. Today, many pastors and churches have organized Community and Economic Development Corporations that serve to meet the needs of the people in their respective communities. Millions of dollars of grant money are pouring into these institutions so that their communities are able to experience revitalization.

In the 25th Chapter of the book of Matthew, Jesus gives us a blue print for what the churches work should be. He talks about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, taking care of strangers or those in need, giving water to those that are thirsty and visiting those that are in prison. This is a great example of the church caring for its community. The transformation of any community is rooted in a solid education and there is no better place for this to begin than in the church. Tavis Smiley in his book, *The Covenant*, writes, "Education starts at home, in neighborhoods, and in communities, reading to children, creating time and space for homework, and demonstrating through words or deeds that education is important and a key first building block for high educational achievement. While schools are responsible for what children are taught, reinforcement at home is essential. As members of the Black community, we must take responsibility for educating

²⁵Felder, *The Original African Heritage Bible*, 1425.

children, whether ours by birth or otherwise, to uplift people as a whole.”²⁶ It is our job to lift our community out of its predicament. We should not leave it up to others what we can and should do for ourselves.

In his book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, James Cone writes, “The role of Black theology is to tell Blacks to focus on their own self-determination as a community by preparing to do anything the community believes necessary for its existence.”²⁷ In essence, when the educational system is suffering, we must stand in the gap, when people in the community are not eating, we must feed them, where there is a lack of adequate housing in our communities, we must look for ways to alleviate the problem. Whatever our communities need, we must lead the way. Cone also says that the development of Black power and uplift means that the Black community will define its own place, its own way of behaving in the world, regardless of the consequences to majority society.²⁸ In other words, we must not only take responsibility for what happens in our community but we must define what is acceptable, separate from any outside influences.

African American children are at risk, particularly young African American boys. If the trend is going to change, education must become a priority.

Fifty years after the United States Supreme Court’s decision declaring school segregation unconstitutional, most Black children attended public schools where minorities represented the majority of the student body. Students attending schools in predominantly white neighborhoods are less likely to experience teachers of poor quality than are students attending schools in predominantly Black communities. By almost all

²⁶Tavis Smiley, *The Covenant* (Chicago, IL: Third World Press, 2006), 25.

²⁷James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 16.

²⁸*Ibid.*

the common indicators of academic achievement and school quality, students who identify themselves as Black suffer in comparison with students who identify themselves as white.

Cone writes in *A Theology of Black Liberation*, “It takes a special kind of reasoning to conclude that God’s love means that God is no respecter of persons in a society filled with hate, where some think they have the right to define the course of human history for all. Blacks cannot adhere to a view of God that will weaken their drive for liberation. This means that in a racist society, we must insist that God’s love and God’s righteousness are two ways of talking about the same reality. Righteousness means that God is addressing the Black condition: love means that God is doing so in the interests of both Black and whites. The blackness of God points to the righteousness of God, as well as to the love of God.”²⁹

Cone is making the inference that we must not be so intoxicated by religion that we lose our drive and hunger to be liberated from our present condition. While we are aware of the power of our God and the fact that He is with us, we must not be numb to the fact that it is our responsibility to be proactive as well.

In summation, Cone uses a quote by Martin Luther King Jr. in his book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, when he says, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. What affects one directly, affects all indirectly. As long as there is poverty in this world, no one can be totally healthy.

²⁹James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 76-77.

Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be.

You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.”³⁰

As the church, we must never rest until injustice is defeated and our people are on equal footing. The most alarming occurrence in the African American community is what is happening to young men. The answer to this epidemic lies in an educational system that is equal in its attempt to insure a quality education for all children regardless of color or socio-economic considerations. In addition to education, a solid program of mentoring and accountability must be implemented. This will ensure that young boys are seeing people that look like them who have achieved.

Theological Foundation

The theological basis for this project will primarily find its underpinning in what is known as liberation theology. In the book *Christian Theology* written by Alister E. McGrath, the writer asserts that liberation theology could, in theory, be applied to any theology, which is addressed to or deals with oppressive situations.³¹ Equally, Black theology is unquestionably concerned with the issue of liberation. However, in practice, the term is used to refer to a quite distinct form of theology, which has its origins in the Latin American situation in the 1960's and 1970's. In 1968, the Roman Catholic Bishops of Latin America gathered for a congress at Medellin, Colombia. This meeting, often known as CELAM II, sent shock waves throughout the region by acknowledging that the church had often sided with oppressive governments in the region, and declaring that in the future it would be on the side of the poor. In this instance, the fact that God is on the

³⁰Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xxi.

³¹Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 90.

side of the poor leads to a further insight: the poor occupy a position of special importance in the interpretation of Christian faith. In this instance all Christian theology and mission must begin with the view from the bottom, with the suffering and distress of the poor. Liberation involves critical reflection on practice. Theology should not be detached from social involvement or political action. Whereas classical western theology regarded action as the result of reflection, liberation theology inverts the order: action comes first, followed by critical reflection. In other words, theology has to stop explaining the world and start transforming the world.

In liberation theological thought, scripture is read as a narrative of liberation. Particular emphasis is laid upon the liberation of Israel from bondage in Egypt, the prophets' denunciation of oppression, and Jesus' proclamation of the gospel to the poor and outcast. Scripture in this instance is read, not from a standpoint of wishing to understand the gospel, but out of a concern to apply its liberating insights to the plight of those in need. Western academic theology has tended to regard this approach with some impatience, believing that it has no place for the considered insights of biblical scholarship concerning the interpretation of such passages. Liberation theology has tended to equate salvation with liberation, and stressed the social, political, and economic aspects of salvation. The movement has laid particular emphasis upon the notion of structural sin, noting that it is society, rather than individuals, that is corrupted and requires redemption. To its critics, liberation theology has reduced salvation to a purely worldly affair, and neglected its eternal aspects.

Black theology is the movement, especially significant in the United States during the 1960's and 1970's, which concerned itself with ensuring that the realities of the Black

experience were represented at the theological level³² One of the most famous proponents of Black theology and liberation theology is James H. Cone. In Cones book, he asserts, Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. This means that its sole reason for existence is to put into ordered speech, the meaning of Gods activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that its inner thrust for liberation is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ³³

There can be no Christian theology that is not identified with those who are humiliated and abused. In fact, theology ceases to be a theology of the gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed. For it is impossible to speak of the God of Israelite history, who is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, without recognizing that God is the God of and for those who labor and are burdened.

Cone writes as it pertains to Black theology, “The task of Black theology, then, is to analyze the nature of the gospel as inseparable from their humiliated condition, and as bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of oppression.³⁴ The goal of Black theology then, is to interpret God’s activity as related to the oppressed Black community. In other words, if the problems exist, then God will provide solutions to those problems.

In considering the plight of the inner city and many African American youth, particularly young men, God will give us what we need to work on such a condition. If

³²McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 91.

³³Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1.

³⁴Ibid., 5.

what Cones says is true about Blacks, taking responsibility for their condition, then we must set up programs that will steer us in the direction of liberation. The role of liberation theology is to tell Blacks to focus on their own self-determination as a community for its literal existence and survival. Black theology, responding to the Black condition, takes on the character of rebelling against the way that things are now and looks forward to a day when things will be better. Liberation theology is a survival theology; it must speak with passion consistent with the depths of the wounds of the oppressed. Theological language is a passionate language, the language of commitment, because it is language, which seeks to vindicate those being hurt and condemn the perpetrators of injustice.

James Cone says in his book *A Black Theology of Liberation*, "The problem with American theology is that it has spoken without passion. It has failed miserably in relating its work to the oppressed in society by refusing to confront the structures of this nation with the evil of racism."³⁵

In this capitalistic society, it seems as if the object is to get all you can. The United States places a premium on personal success and achievement. Due to this fact, people seem to spend their lives getting more than giving. Even in terms of our government, there are those that fight against the social programs necessary to help the poor and the ones that would be the benefactors.

It could be argued that this attitude has caused the problems that we see in terms of poverty, education and the plethora of other problems that exist in many of our metropolitan areas. This need for a liberating theology can be seen especially in the oppressive make up of our inner city schools. Tavis Smiley, in his book *The Covenant*

³⁵Ibid., 19.

says, “The state of education in Black America is considerably better than it was 100 years ago, better than even fifty years ago. Some evidence suggests that our progress has been uneven during the past half-century. There is no question, nonetheless, that there remain complex and serious problems. These problems are related to the significant gap between the academic achievement levels of people of color and the achievement levels of Asian American and Euro-American people.”³⁶

This gap must be closed and a proactive and systematic program needs to be implemented, a program that would liberate those that have been disenfranchised and left out, those that have been marginalized. From the Black community and other reasonably well-informed sources, we hear the argument that the achievement gap is a reflection of inadequate opportunities to learn. This argument rests on the findings of inequality in the educational opportunities available to children in American. This is especially a reality for children of color. It is the inequality in educational opportunity that has been the driving force behind the school desegregation movement and behind much of the continuing effort at school reform.

If the effectiveness of education rests on such resources and they are unequally distributed, it is reasonable to anticipate that the effects of education will be unequal. The achievement distribution data correlate highly with the data on access to these forms of capital. Our notion of affirmative development is conceptually grounded in possible approaches to offsetting the negative effects of the mal-distribution would involve the redistribution of income, wealth, and related resources, it is not reasonable to expect that such a radical solution will resonate with 21st century America.

³⁶Smiley, *The Covenant*, 31.

It is possible, however, that even a compassionate conservative society will see it to be in the best interest of the nation to organize its social institutions and its services so as to remove the negative effects of such mal-distribution on the academic and personal development of its people. From the time of slavery to today, Black Americans have struggled to attain high-quality education. During slavery, educating Blacks was forbidden.

Today there is a legal right to attend schools, but for many Blacks, a quality education is almost as difficult to obtain as it was more than a century ago. Schools are more segregated than they were twenty years ago, too many of which are predominantly Black and of low quality. We must demand that local communities provide the resources to educate all children, that the state and federal governments provide sufficient resources. The mandate of educating all of America's children rests on all of us, in particular our youth who are put in a position to be at risk. In this instance as well, the church should be involved. We must practice a theology that is liberating and concerned about the least of these.

James Cone writes in his book, *Black Theology and Black Power*, that accommodation or protest are the only solutions for the Black community.³⁷ In essence, the role of the Black community should be that of protest. We must not sit back and do nothing, but we should protest and then act until change is facilitated. We should not sit back and watch our predicament disintegrate, but we should work as change agents looking for a better tomorrow. Black power then is saying that we will not accommodate oppression, but we will fight against the injustices that we have faced for centuries. Rebellion for the Black man has typically meant extermination, genocide. Moreover,

³⁷Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, 26.

many poor Blacks, being poor for so long, have become accustomed to their condition, feeling that any form of resistance or Black rebellion is useless. The Black middle class or bourgeoisie, having tasted the richness of the majority, do not want to jeopardize their place in society. In this instance there is a lack of realization that we have not in fact arrived until we have all arrived and tasted of the fruit of justice.

In speaking of liberation theology and considering the educational process for our youth, we cannot help to consider the growing population of our young African American brothers that are incarcerated. If the African American community is to be turned around, this will be a problem that must be addressed. In her book the *New Jim Crow*, Michelle Anderson writes, “The impact of the drug war has been astounding. In less than thirty years, the United States penal population exploded from around 300,000 to more than two million, with drug convictions accounting for the majority of the increase.

The United States now has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, dwarfing the rates of nearly every developed country, even surpassing those in highly repressive regimes like Russia, China, and Iran. In Germany, ninety-three people are in prison for every 100,000 adults and children. In the United States, the rate is roughly eight times that or 750 per 100,000.”³⁸

The racial disparity in mass incarceration has been its most astounding feature. No other country in the world imprisons so many of its ethnic minorities. The United States imprisons a larger percentage of its Black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid. In Washington D.C., our nation’s capital, it is estimated that three out of four young Black men and nearly all those in the poorest neighborhoods, can expect to serve time in prison. Similar rates of incarceration can be found in Black communities

³⁸Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 6.

across America. These stark racial disparities cannot be explained by rates of drug crime. However, people of all colors use and sell drugs at rates that are similar.

White youth are more likely to engage in drug crime than people of color. However, this is not the picture being painted if one was to walk through our prisons and consider the population. The prisons are overflowing with Black and brown drug offenders. In some states, Black men have been admitted to prison on drug charges at rates twenty to fifty times greater than those of white men. In major cities ravaged by the drug war, as many as 80 percent of young African American men now have criminal records and are thus subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives. These young men are part of a growing under caste, permanently locked up and locked out of mainstream society. Although crime rates in the United States have not been markedly higher than those of other Western countries, the rate of incarceration has soared in the United States while it has remained stable or declined in other countries.

Today, due to recent declines, U.S. crime rates have dipped below the international norm. Nevertheless, the United States now boasts an incarceration that is ten times greater than that of other industrialized nations.³⁹ This alone should be reason for review and alarm, however there are many in power that continues to turn their head. This is a development that can be traced directly to the war on drugs. The stark and sobering reality is that, for reasons largely unrelated to actual crime trends, the American penal system has emerged as a system of social control unparalleled in world history.

Alarming, while the size of the system alone might suggest that it would touch the lives of most Americans, the primary targets of its control can be defined largely by

³⁹Ibid., 8.

race. This is an astonishing development, especially given that as recently as the 1970's, the most well respected criminologists were predicting that the prison system would soon fade away. Prison did not deter crime significantly, many experts concluded.

Those who had meaningful economic and social opportunities were unlikely to commit crimes regardless of the penalty, while those that went to prison were far more likely to commit crimes again in the future. Alexander writes to support this when she says, "the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals issued a recommendation in 1973 that no new institutions for adults should be built and existing institutions for juveniles should be closed.

The recommendation was based on their finding that the prison, the reformatory, and the jail have achieved only a shocking record of failure. There is overwhelming evidence that these institutions create crime rather than prevent it.⁴⁰ In light of these discoveries it goes without saying that liberation theology is one that can and should find justification within the African American condition. To many of our African American brothers are falling prey to this oppressive system.

Liberation theology will accept only a love of God, which participates in the destruction of the oppressor. It takes literally the Biblical teaching that the last will be first, and first shall be last. It is the putting into practice of this sentence. Blacks cannot adhere to a view of God that will weaken their drive for liberation. This means that in an unjust society, we must insist that God's love and Gods righteousness means that God is addressing the Black condition; love means that God is doing so in the interests of all people. In essence, this means that justice is the structure necessary for the human expression of human freedom.

⁴⁰Ibid., 18.

To be God, God must protect both the freedom and the structure of human behavior. It is interesting that the majority say that they adhere to the meaning of Jesus Christ's existence in the world, they are especially concerned about winning at seemingly any cost. The military budget of this country is evidence of this fact. When confronted with the uncompromising demands of the Black community, they quickly remind us that they have all of the guns, as if that fact is supposed to make Blacks stay in their place.

In being Christian it would seem that they should know because he did not stay in his place. In fact, that is what an authentic Christian existence is all about, the refusal to stay in one's place. Of course, this may mean physical death, but death is beside the point when one knows there is a depth to existence that transcends death.

The death and resurrection of Christ were an expression of God's transcendence, that is, human beings do not have to live on the basis of mere physical existence. They are free to transcend it, free to encounter the presence of the infinite, which transcends a physical reality. This is why we do not have to cling to physical life as if it were the ultimate. In essence there are times we will have to give of ourselves that others would be the benefactors.

The sole purpose of God in liberation theology and Black theology is to illuminate the Black condition so that Blacks can see that their liberation is the manifestation of God's activity. The basic mistake of the majority is their failure to see that God did not become a universal human being but an oppressed Jew, thereby disclosing to us that both human nature and divine nature are inseparable from oppression and liberation.

To know who the human person is, is to focus on the oppressed one and what he does for an oppressed community as it liberates from an enslaved condition. To be fully human then, is to be involved, participating in societal structures for human liberation. Being human means being against evil by joining sides with those who are the victims of evil. Literally, it means becoming oppressed with the oppressed making their cause one's own cause by involving oneself in the liberation struggle.

No one is free until all are free. In order to be free, a person must be able to make choices that are not dependent on an oppressive system. This will involve suffering because liberation means a confrontation between evil and the will of the God who directs history. Real Christians can never be content as long as their sisters and brothers are in an enslaved condition. They must suffer with them, knowing that freedom for Jesus Christ is always freedom for the oppressed. Christian freedom has its beginning in the midst of all the misery of this world and we can only demonstrate this freedom by using our own freedom for the actual liberation of man from his misery. In this sense, ours is to move from religion to practice.

Historical Foundation

The Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's found its beginnings in the bosom of the African American Church. During this time, much of the activity of the church was centered on the rights of those that had been disenfranchised and relegated to a standard of living that was below the norm. The church, particularly as it pertained to the movement, focused its efforts on things such as education, joblessness, poverty, housing, economic inequality and a host of other issues that were plaguing people of

color. It is interesting to note that churches during this time would band together for a common cause, pool their resources, and unite on particular issues. It was not uncommon for churches to start credit unions, schools and even open supermarkets in an attempt to strengthen and revitalize their communities.

During the 1980's and 1990's another trend began to emerge that still exist today, the rise of community and economic development corporations that exist as an extended arm of the church and its ministries. In considering this phenomenon, one could say that community and economic development is nothing more than a modern day program of social justice. Among these organizations you will find a wide array of missions and philosophies. This is due to the fact that typically, the said mission of the organization will find its origin in the needs of the people of the community that it serves.

The focus for this project is mentoring at-risk children, particularly as it pertains to the African American male. The primary factor and the primary contribution to this epidemic is an inadequate education as it pertains to this segment of youth. However, with the lack of an adequate education, a list of other problems will find its way into the communities where these youth live. Whether it is joblessness, homelessness, a lack of housing, food or just poverty, these issues must be addressed. Many of the community and economic development corporations have been set up as extensions of the church to address these ills in their respective communities. In this treatment, examples of these organizations and how they have effectively mentored youth and built bridges to a better and brighter future.

Mentoring is not a recent phenomenon. Mentoring can be traced to the biblical text. Mentoring is a biblical idea. Although the word mentor itself is never used in

scripture, the principles applied when using that terminology are found throughout the biblical text. We see numerous examples of mentoring relationships taking place throughout the Bible. In some cases, individuals were involved in multiple mentoring relationships. Sometimes mentoring happened on a one to one basis, and in other cases, mentoring took place in a group setting. However, the group was always small enough to listen and interact.

Jesus mentored twelve, sometimes three and on rare occasion, one. As an example of this assertion, Jethro mentored Moses. Moses mentored Joshua and the elders of Israel and Joshua mentored the other remaining leaders of his army. Eli mentored Samuel; Samuel mentored Saul and David. Ahithophel and Nathan the prophet also mentored David. David became Israel's greatest king. David mentored his army commanders and government officials to establish the united nation of Israel. David also mentored Solomon. Solomon mentored the Queen of Sheba, who returned to her people with his wisdom in the form of Proverbs that applied to God's laws. Elijah mentored Elisha and Elisha in turn mentored king Jehoash and others.

Daniel Mentored Nebuchadnezzar, who humbled himself before God. Mordacai mentored Esther. Esther mentored King Artaxerxes, which led to the liberation of God's people. Priscilla and Aquila mentored Apollos, and this resulted in an improved ministry for Apollos.⁴¹

Finally Jesus mentored the twelve apostles who established the Christian Church. The apostles mentored hundreds of other leaders, including Paul. Paul mentored Titus, Timothy and many others. Timothy mentored faithful men such as Epaphras. Epaphras

⁴¹Staff, "A Biblical Model of Mentoring" Threads Media, (November 11, 2010), under "Leads," <http://threadsmedia.com/lead/article/the-biblical-modelofmentoring>.

and the other faithful men mentored others also, which led to a chain reaction that resulted in dozens of new churches in Asia. Ultimately, this specific mentoring chain is the beginning point of our churches today.

We are living in an interesting time in history. For what is likely the first time in the history of the Christian church, generations are not worshiping together. It now appears normal to see older generations meeting together wearing suits and singing hymns, boomers wearing casual shirts and singing up-beat songs about how Jesus changed their lives, and emerging generations meeting in dark rooms singing in minor keys. However, from an historical perspective, this is not normal, beyond that, it is ultimately harmful to the church.

Interestingly enough, it is not what young people actually want, either. Far from a leave us alone mentality, today's young adults are very interesting in learning from, interacting with and forming bonds with previous generations. This desire for people outside of their age demographic can be seen as a subset of the overall desire for relationships and community, but because of the specific and unique nature of these particular relationships, the characteristic of connection stands on its own. "Young adults place heavy value on connecting with people who have more life experience than they do. Some would call this mentoring or cross-generational ministry, the bottom line is that they want to learn from someone else's experience."⁴²

The scriptural references that are given are not necessarily meant to show that young adults desire relationships of this nature because they want to follow the biblical model. However, emerging generations recognize almost naturally that they have a lot to

⁴²Ibid.

learn, and the Bible affirms a relationship model that can be used to meet that need, Moreover, because they live with such experiential interest in life, that learning process is most effective walking side by side with someone, rather than just sitting in a classroom.

The simplest definition of mentoring is relational empowerment. In sentence form, mentoring can be defined as a relational experience where one person is empowered by another through the sharing of God-given resources. The interdependency between the two key words in this definition, relational and empowerment can be described, as the level of empowerment that results from mentoring is directly proportional to the depth of the relationship.

A deep relationship between mentor and mentee opens the door for greater levels of empowerment. Yet it is important to clarify the relational component of mentoring as something that should not be confused with disproportionate amounts of time or social contact. Your mentor does not have to be your best friend in order to empower at deep levels. Yet he or she does need to be someone you trust, can be vulnerable with and respect. This line of mutual trust is critical if the relationship is to generate more than superficial results.

One of the common myths of mentoring is that of the ideal mentor. The fact is, there is no one person that will be able to provide all the input you need. It is much more practical to think about mentoring in terms of the functions mentors perform. When seeking a mentor it is important to consider the specific mentoring functions needed most and to enlist a mentor that can serve in that role. Mentoring can be an effective tool in terms of building up the inner cities of our nation.

In considering our subject, the work of an organization named People for People Inc., located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania will be considered. The Reverend Herbert H. Lusk founded this organization. It is widely considered one of the standard bearers in terms of community and economic development in our country. Since 1982 the Reverend Dr. Herbert H. Lusk has served as the senior pastor of the Greater Exodus Baptist Church of North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. When he arrived at the church they had more than one million dollars of repairs to do to the building and only seventeen members in the congregation.

Today that number totals more than two thousand and counting. Pastor Lusk has increasingly committed himself to the service of those in poverty: those without jobs, the homeless, the hungry and those in prison and their families.

As an outgrowth of the needs of the church and community, Pastor Lusk founded the People for People Inc. (PFP), which is a separate extension from Greater Exodus focusing on education, entrepreneurship, and property renewal and mentoring. The children and families served by People for People are predominantly low income African Americans, more than half of who live in single parent family groups. Most are renters.

A significant number reside in the West Poplar Apartments, the Richard Allen Homes and throughout the Franciville and Fairmont circumference. "The mission is to break the vicious generational cycle of poverty in the lives of economically challenged residents of Philadelphia by providing them with positive alternatives to drugs, crime and welfare dependency. Recognizing the complex and inter connected obstacles facing low income urban residence, PFP provides support services to residents and links distressed

neighborhoods with concerned leadership and available resources. PFP facilitates the development of personal responsibility, accountability and self-reliance”⁴³

The work of PFP is diverse and encompasses several programs designed to aid those in distress. Each of these programs is relational in nature and provides aspects of mentoring. The engine that runs PFP is their (EARN) program. This is the Employment Advancement and Retention Network. EARN provides comprehensive welfare to work services to clients through barrier remediation via one on one case management, job search and placement, and referrals for education and training. This program is one of the leading models of its kind in the nation.

Another service is the Hope Pregnancy Center. This program provides counseling support services for women, men and their families facing unexpected pregnancies. The program provides positive alternatives to unplanned pregnancies, working to meet both the needs of the woman and her child at every level. Their goal is to offer pregnancy related services and educate empower and equip every woman to choose life.

Another aspect of PFP is its renowned Charter School that educates children from kindergarten to eighth grades with a curriculum that incorporates entrepreneurship into the main subjects. The underlying purpose of the People for People Charter School is to equip students with a challenging educational experience in which the fundamentals of entrepreneurship are a primary focus. Economic, community and career education are being integrated into all subject areas in each grade. Their student’s acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and interests through a highly innovated program. They learn how to be informed decision makers as spenders, investors, borrowers and managers of money and

⁴³“People for People,” accessed January 22, 2013, <http://www.peopleforpeople.org>.

to act on these decisions wisely by playing a significant role in the existing people for people community programs.

Another program that PFP facilitates is the (SOAR) program. This is the Student Occupational and Academic Readiness Program. The SOAR program serves at risk youth through summer programming, supporting skill acquisition, work readiness, and exposure to high priority industries. This program attracts a wide range of high school students with a common condition: a worldview limited by economic resources. They provide insights into job readiness as well as the demands of some high priority industries, including computer and data services, health services, life science, transportation, communications, utilities and more.

Another component of PFP's outreach is the PFP Early Childhood Development Center. This center educates children from six months to five years of age to prepare them for kindergarten and lifelong learning. Each day these professionals work hard to support and nurture children by creating enriching lessons to help children grown socially, emotionally and cognitively. Along with all of the educational activities these children receive, PFP ECDC also provides children with a nutritious breakfast, lunch and afternoon snack.

A component that PFP has is called Project Fresh Start. This program assists ex-offenders to successfully transition back into Philadelphia through comprehensive mentoring services, increasing public safety and reducing recidivism. This project recruits and trains mentors as well as provides transitional services and mentoring to offenders who are incarcerated in the State Correctional Institute of Chester (SCI-C).

The last program is People for Peoples Project Restore. This program assists juvenile offenders residing in North Philadelphia to connect to their community through service learning, learning skills through vocational training in the high demand hospitality industry, and gaining work experience through employment. The goal of Project Restore is to strengthen the community in which the majority of ex-offenders return through expansion of FPF employment—centered programs that focus on job opportunities and training for in demand hospitality occupations.

Reverend Dr. Herbert Lusk is a personal mentor and family friend. The unique aspect of his program's thrust is a constant mentor and mentee emphasis that constantly is reinforcing behaviors for future success. In this instance he is taking a holistic approach. However, there is quite a bit of emphasis being placed on the young African American male. He covers many of the areas of importance such as financial literacy, ex-offender re-entry, education, job readiness, entrepreneurship and many others.

It is my contention that if our youth, who are at risk are to be helped, we must put together a comprehensive plan of mentoring that will provide guidance at all stages of their development. The problems they face with the exception of a few have not changed with time. However, there has been an attitude that has developed that has caused many to lose their sense of urgency. We must act, organize and move like never before recognizing that our children's future depends on it. People for People and many other agencies like them are benefiting with the aid of many caring stakeholders.

There is also a lot of aid that is coming from state and local governments. Grants are accessible that will aid our ability to provide these resources to our children. Many are unaware, but mentoring youth is the number one initiative of our President and First

Lady, Barak and Michelle Obama. We must also remember that all of us, for better or worse have those that have mentored us in our lives. We must make sure that children have a chance and participate and become their bridge to a better future.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

This chapter proposes to introduce the implementation of this research project at the Creighton Court Recreational Center in Richmond, Virginia. The mentoring curriculum is designed to be a vehicle in which African American young men can be supported and set on a path to wholeness. During this process, youth that are facing hopelessness and despair will develop confidence and a new perspective. The goal of this project is to enhance the emotional and attitudinal well-being of incarcerated young men in a positive way enabling them to become strong citizens in their respective communities.

The hypothesis asserts, if an adequate curriculum is put in place to address the systemic problems facing youth in the city of Richmond, Virginia, causing them to be labeled as trouble and outcasts in society, they would be able to not only function, but succeed in life. This research project seeks to prove that by utilizing a specific and detailed set of instructions, young men will develop confidence and the proper attitudinal and emotional outlook to succeed. Ten youth will be selected from the Creighton Recreational Center in Richmond, Virginia. These youth will be between the ages of fourteen to sixteen. Creighton Court is established in the center of the Creighton Court projects. This location was chosen due to the overwhelming amount of neglect and poverty that exist within the community. Through this program, participants can

experience the transformation necessary to achieve success in their lives. Their reality can be one of thriving and not just surviving. Over the course of this project, the participants will realize an expectation of achieving at the highest levels possible. High achievement will be made possible by knowing that men before them succeeded at the highest levels that emerged from similar living conditions.

A series of sessions will be held to provide a venue for openness and a place where the program participants can share. The sessions will consist of open dialogue or rap sessions, film clips, group discussions and journal discussions. The previously mentioned process will be utilized to invoke consciousness, confidence, attitudinal enhancement, emotional strengthening and possible solutions to aid the participants in succeeding.

In the book *Research Design*, by John Creswell, he states, “There are three distinct types of research, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods”¹ This research process will employ a mixed method approach that resides in the middle of this continuum because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This research process will begin by defining and then explaining the meaning of mentoring. The next step will be a discussion on confidentiality and the signing of confidentiality agreements. During the weeks to come, life journeys and those who have impacted them will be discussed.

The second session will begin with the researcher’s personal life journey and those people that have impacted him. Following the researcher’s presentation, the ten participants will give their stories. During the third session we will discuss the meaning and definitions associated with mentoring. In this session we will discuss what it means

¹John W. Creswell, *Research Design* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2009), 3.

to be mentored and the possibilities that are available because of mentoring. During this session we will view two film clips. One film is about an athlete who was mentored by a professional athlete who came from humble beginnings. Because of a teacher who took an interest in him he was able to succeed. The other clip will show how a successful African American attorney was able to escape poverty because of the influence of a male mentor.

The fourth session will cover the importance and effects of having a positive attitude. The participants will also participate in a group discussion on what it means to have a positive attitude versus a negative attitude. In this session the participants will watch a film clip on having a positive attitude and its potential outcomes, then they will watch another film clip and look at the effects of a negative attitude and what the possibilities are if such occurs.

The final topics are commitment and achievement. We will discuss the importance of commitment and achievement. In this session, we will discuss and show examples of those who have succeeded because of commitment and those that have failed. In this session we will also give some instruction on how to excel in school and in everyday life. At the end of this session, the researcher invited one of his mentors to share how they have made a difference and have impacted his life. In the final session, keys to finding a good mentor will be discussed.

This research project will be performed utilizing a mixed method's approach. The participants will be given a survey on their emotions and attitudes regarding mentoring. The participant's will be evaluated on their participation in the exercises as well as their sharing during the discussions.

The group participants will be given a pre and post survey. The pre and post survey will provide the necessary information to measure emotional and attitudinal changes. The group participants will also keep and provide a journal in order that a more concise means of triangulating the data can be achieved.

Lastly, the project will determine whether or not the participants were able to receive the necessary help in strengthening their attitudes towards achievement and mentoring. The final results will determine the participant's receptiveness and attitude towards the mentoring process. The desired outcome was to provide the participants with an atmosphere where they could be open and honest and where they could see the advantages of mentoring.

Curriculum Example

The first session and every session will begin and end with a quote or poem of affirmation. The first session will begin with the introduction and explanation of the research project. The participants will be made aware of the overall process and there expected participation. This session will also include a detailed explanation concerning confidentiality and trust. The confidentiality forms designed for the project will then be distributed and signed by participants. The next step will consist of a detailed explanation and definition of mentoring.

Following this discussion, the participants will be required to participate in completing a ten-question survey consisting of questions pertaining to their attitudinal and emotional state of mind. The culmination of this session will entail a group discussion concerning weekly journaling encompassing their personal reflection and consideration.

The second session will provide the participants with the opportunity to give their personal stories and discuss who has been impactful in their life and why. This session will culminate with a group discussion of their weekly journaling and reflection. The third session will begin by discussing the concept of mentoring. Following the discussion on mentoring the participants will view a film on a professional basketball player by the name of Jalen Rose who had no father figure but had a teacher who showed an interest in him that made a difference. The participants also will view a second film, which is about an African American trial attorney named Willie Gary who was a successful businessman in his neighborhood that showed an interest in youth and deposited positive possibilities. After viewing these films, the participants will share their thoughts on the clips. The culmination of these sessions will be a discussion of their weekly journals.

The fourth session will begin with a discussion on the importance and effects of having a positive attitude. Next we will have a group discussion on negative personalities versus positive personalities. We will then show a film depicting students that have a positive attitude versus those that are negative and the possibilities in terms of predictable end results. At the end of this clip they will see an African American male who made bad decisions and ends up in prison. In another clip, an African American male worked hard in school and made solid decisions and ends up a doctor. At the end of this session we give a brief recap and discuss our weekly journaling.

The fifth and final session will begin with the discussion on commitment and achievement. During this discussion we will discuss those that have succeeded despite the odds. One such person is Dr. Ben Carson who came up in a household with one parent but became a world-renowned pediatric surgeon. We also will show an example of

an African American teenager who finds himself in gangs and ends up getting killed. We also will discuss steps we need to take in order to succeed in life. Dr. Ronald King Hill, Lawrence's mentor will share his life and the role he has played in Lawrence's life. The session will conclude with a ten-question post survey.

Conclusion

The goal of this research project is to provide African American men with an alternative to succumbing to societal pressures and stigma. For far too long we have watched hopelessly as our young African American males have been gripped by a system that has deemed them useless and incapable of succeeding. This project provides a detailed analysis of these young men as they journey across the bridge of a brighter future, struggling but inwardly hoping for a better day. The courage these young men will show during the course of this project should serve as hope and a reminder that our young men can succeed even in the face of societal obstacles.

The objective of this research is to show our young African American men that men have been successful through similar circumstances and found solutions to their obstacles. The research should also remind those in these communities that it is time for them to step up and do their part as it relates to these young men.

It is due to a fire that burns deep in the bosom of this researcher that he shall continue to make a difference in these stones that the builder has rejected.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

The field experience relative to this particular research project has been very rewarding and enlightening. In the initial stages of this research project there were some challenges. The gathering and selection of participants proved to be the most challenging of endeavors. The first order of business was to inform the participants that the implementation of this project would consist of five sessions lasting approximately two and one half hours per session.

On March 6, 2013 the implementation began at 3:00 P.M. As would be the custom, each session was opened with a poem of affirmation. The session began with an introduction and explanation of the research project. The next step was to have participants introduce themselves. An overview of the research project provides the participants with a clear expectation of what would be coming next. As Lawrence talked to the young men he could see the excitement in their eyes. Lawrence could feel a sense of them being excited about the subject matter and being a part of something different with their peers. He could see that they were eager to be a part of a process that would have adult males show interest in them and provide guidance. The next step was the receiving of the parental consent forms. An explanation of the process and confidentiality was also explained. The participants were very relieved that this would be an environment where they would be able to share openly without their issues being

exposed. As the facilitator of the group, Lawrence let them know that he would be sharing his experiences with them. He could sense that this put the group as a whole at ease.

The next order of business was a detailed discussion and definition of mentoring. An explanation and brief self-experiential illustration allowed the group to do a self-analysis of the lack of mentoring or presence of guidance in their lives. As Lawrence spoke, several of the participants could be seen contemplating why others seemed to be looking for answers. The participants were made aware that all of us have influences, some negative and some positive. They were made aware that one of the biggest decisions we make is who we allow to influence us. A few of the young men could not wait to share what they believed to be positive factors in their lives, while one particular boy looked as if he wanted to cry while sharing that he has had no one to really help him. The rest of the group was eagerly listening and evaluating how mentoring has or could affect their lives, you could see and hear them assessing their own circumstances. At that moment Lawrence felt that we were already on the right path.

Evaluating the Pre and Post Questions

The next step was to distribute and discuss the necessity of the pre and post questions. The group was informed that the pre and post questions would be used as a tool or means to measure their progress before and after the implementation process. They were informed that the same set of questions would be answered at the beginning and the end of the process. A discussion of the questions allowed the group to realize that evaluations of their own emotional and attitudinal changes were being measured.

The following is a list of the questions that measured emotional change: 1) Do I feel Loved? 2) Do I feel like I have the support to succeed in life? 3) Do I feel that I am able to excel in school? 4) Do I feel that my parents are supportive? 5) Do I feel like I have a bright future?

The following is a list of questions that measured attitudinal change: 1) Is having a mentor important to you? 2) Do you believe that you will succeed in life? 3) Is getting a good education important to you? 4) Do you believe that you can overcome obstacles to succeed? 5) Does it help you seeing examples of others doing what you want to do in life.

After the answering of the pre-survey questions, a plan and discussion regarding weekly journaling was introduced. The group was informed that in order to triangulate their data, another form of documentation would be required. This was to be achieved through weekly journaling. The group was given the instruction to journal the day after each session. This exercise would provide each participant a time for deep reflection. The group was also made aware that the journaling would be a means for them to monitor their own progress throughout the process. The session then ended with instructions as to how we would proceed.

Week two began on March 13, 2013. The session opened with a poem of affirmation. The session began with a brief overview of what would be taking place that day. Immediately following the introduction, several of the participants expressed how much they enjoyed the first session's activities and how much they were looking forward to what was to come. This session would prove to be one of the most difficult as well as the participants shared their particular stories.

As Lawrence began to reveal his life's journey and talk about those that influenced him, He could see in the faces of the young men their amazement at what he had been through and what some of his experiences had been. Lawrence shared with the participants that the process they were also engaging in was therapeutic for him. As the participants shared their stories, Lawrence could see vestiges of pain at times, at other times he could see the relief on their faces as they had a chance to articulate and at times give meaning to what they had been feeling. Often the discussions became so intense for the participants that you could see tears in their eyes. During session Lawrence could really feel the participants coming together as a group.

At the end of the second session there was a unique and unspoken bond made between the participants as they realized that they had shared something special in their personal stories, yet had safety in knowing that others could relate. This in itself formed an environment in which participants gravitated closer to one another. At the end of the session the participants were reminded to do their journaling the next day. This session was the longest session due to stories that the participants shared. As the session ended you could feel that they were emotionally drained and that it was time to adjourn.

Week three began on March 20, 2013. This session as always began with a poem of affirmation. Following the poem of affirmation something amazing happened. Several of the participants began to share how much the journaling had been helping them. These young men said that they felt better by writing what they were feeling. Several of the young men said that they were starting to feel better about their prospects for the future. One young man thanked Lawrence for allowing him to participate and shared with him the difference the project was already beginning to make. Next the group began to

discuss the concept of mentoring. Following the discussion we viewed a brief clip of a professional basketball athlete by the name of Jalen Rose who had no father figure but had a teacher that believed in him, taught him the importance of an education, and still is instrumental in his life to this very day. Jalen went on to share how this teacher stayed on him about his academic performance. He said that the teacher would not allow him to make excuses about succeeding. He would not let Jalen use the fact that he lived in the projects and did not have the educational states of man stop his drive to succeed. Jalen went on to say that he owed a lot of his success to the teacher.

Following the clip a discussion ensued in reference to how the participants felt about the Jalen Rose story. Many of the participants said that they could relate due to the fact that they too had no father present. One young man said that he would have to consider looking at his teachers differently. He said that he has one teacher that he thought did not like him but really cared for him. The responses that were received from the group left Lawrence to believe that they shared the general consensus that nobody cared about their circumstances.

In the next segment of the session, the participants watched a story on a famous African American Attorney named Willie Gary. A successful businessman in his community took a serious interest in the young Gary and captivated him. Gary said that this man deposited positive thoughts in his mind and allowed him to know what the possibilities could be if he worked hard. At the end of the clip we discussed the Willie Gary story. Lawrence could literally see the excitement building on these young men's face. It made me feel as if we were really going in the right direction. In their eyes Lawrence could literally see hope and possibilities of a brighter future. Gary talked about

how this man vicariously instilled in him a work ethic. He began to develop a desire to succeed academically. He said there was something about this man that made him feel like he could accomplish anything even in the face of poverty and what others would say were insurmountable circumstances. As the participants begin to share, one young man said they he too, secretly had dreams of being a lawyer. Lawrence asked the young man why secretly. He just shrugged his shoulders. Lawrence told him that if he works hard, starting today that nothing would be impossible.

During this clip, Willie Gary begin to talk about how working hard and school was the key to his success. He went to explain that he went to Historically Black institutions of higher learning but because of his desire and work ethic was able to compete and succeed at the highest levels. Today he has made it to the pinnacle of his profession. He talked about how he has done so well that he was now able to give back and make a difference in the lives of others. Lawrence asked each of these young men to make a mental note of what they wanted to be and to carry that picture with them every day of their lives. The culmination of the session was to discuss their journals from the previous week. Lawrence then reminded them of the expectation that they have their journals ready for the next session.

Week four began on March 27, 2013. We began this session as we always do with a poem of affirmation. We began this session talking about attitude and the importance of having a positive attitude. During this session Lawrence showed a clip of a young man that had a bright future but fell into serious trouble due to peer pressure. His brother who was a grade below him worked hard and did not allow external forces to derail his destiny. The brother who gave into the peer pressure finds himself in jail serving a long

sentence. His brother ends up receiving a scholarship and becoming an attorney. After watching the clip we engaged in a group discussion. This discussion was very interesting as one of the young men who seemed to be a ring leader, and not a positive influence, break down and share that no one really cared about him. He admitted that he would often act out because it was the only way that could get attention. Finally, what Lawrence was hoping for with this young man was starting to happen. Not only was he admitting that something was wrong but he was beginning to see that better days could be ahead. Then they began to talk about the possibilities of making the right decisions and having a positive attitude. We then looked at what making bad decisions can do. Lawrence made sure that he not only affirmed these young men, but that he shared with them that success was not only possible but would be inevitable if they worked hard. To my excitement Lawrence began to see that they too were beginning to believe that it was possible. The session ended with the discussion of the previous week's journaling. Lawrence asked them to continue journaling for the following week.

Week five began on April 10, 2013. This session began with our poem of affirmation. We then began a discussion on commitment and achievement. During this discussion we discussed what it meant to be committed and the results that being committed brought about. We discussed the importance of achieving at the highest of levels. The participants shared and Lawrence was elated to see the growth in them. You could see that the previous weeks were impactful for them. You could see that the light had come on and that they desired more for themselves. One young man said that he felt that through his participation in this project he believed he could, for the first time, make a difference and make something out of his self. After the discussion Lawrence showed a

clip of Dr. Ben Carson a renowned pediatric surgeon. In the clip, Dr. Carson explains how he did not start off as the best student, but overtime worked incredibly hard to improve. With hard work he was able to overcome a single-family household, poverty and all that comes with not growing up on the right side of the tracks. Lawrence also showed a clip on YouTube of an African American teenager who is a promising athlete. This young man was due to receive a scholarship but ends up getting hooked on drugs and in gangs and gets killed. During our discussion about this film, Lawrence was stunned when one of the participants said that it happens in his Hood every day. To this young man, it was more than a film clip that he had just watched; it was his reality. At the end of the discussion we created an action plan as to how we would progress and succeed in life.

As we were about to culminate, Lawrence introduced the group to one of his mentors, Dr. Ronald King Hill. Dr. Hill is an esteemed pastor in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and a lifetime educator. Lawrence shared with the group what Dr. Hill had meant to him and how he had instilled in him a love of learning and excellence. Lawrence explained to them that it was not just in what he would say but what he watched Dr. Hill do. Dr. Hill shared where Lawrence was when he met him and how he was able to progress over the years. He shared with them how he constantly stayed on Lawrence about his education and how he would always affirm him and let him know that what Lawrence saw was possible. After Dr. Hill spoke, many of the participants had questions for him. One of the most interesting questions came from a young man who asked Dr. Hill who his mentors were. Lawrence briefly smiled due to the fact he could see him asking him the same thing. As a matter of fact they have had those discussions

hundreds of times over the years. We then discussed the final journaling of the implementation phase.

The final segment of the last and final installment ended with the participants being given the posttest questions. Many of them were curious to see the difference between the pre-test and post-test. As the session came to a close, many of the participants expressed feelings of gratitude. Several of the participants asked the question of why it had to end. The Director of the community center also expressed his thanks and said that they would be looking into doing something similar in the near future. Lawrence was so moved by these young men that Lawrence gave them my information so that we could stay in touch and promised them that Lawrence would be watching their progress closely.

Results of the Ministry Model

The implementation of the ministry model has provided results that were both predictable and unexpected. The responses from the project brought about a variety of mixed feelings. The following is a list of results on a weekly basis.

The project began with an introduction of the research project. The response of the participants seemed to bring about a sense of hope in their seemingly hopeless reality. My belief is that the icebreaker was the initial discussion on this being an environment where they would be able to share. A group discussion on mentoring and its impact provided participants with a clear definition and expectation as to the direction we would be going. The defined concept of mentoring provided the participants with the ability to reflect about their own lives and the presence or lack of an influential presence. The

importance of weekly journaling was discussed and the participants were able to see the impact and significance in the writing about the previous session.

The discussion that we engaged concerning our life's journey and those that impacted our life was effective. The researcher discussing his personal journey and those that were instrumental in impacting his life in a positive way initiated it. The result of these open discussions caused the participants to experience the feeling that their circumstances could be overcome.

The discussions that were facilitated on the effects of having positive and negative attitudes were also very helpful. These discussions helped the participants realize the importance of their decision-making and caused them to understand that much of what happens to them is within their control. The film clip of Jalen Rose the professional basketball player and Willie Gary the famous attorney gave them a feeling that they too could rise above poverty and single parent existences and succeed and become whatever they put their minds to. The discussion on commitment and achievement left these young men with the fortitude to succeed. Lawrence literally watched them move from an attitude of doubt to one of confidence.

The person example of the researcher's mentor really aided the implementation process by showing the young men the effects of positive mentoring in the life of the facilitator. The overall result as stated by the participants was an experience that was life changing and rewarding.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In reflecting on the beginning of this Doctor of Ministry program at United Theological Seminary, Lawrence cannot help but remember how overwhelming at the onset it was. At the onset, one of my best friends and me, Anthony Leroy Nutt, sat through our initial orientation and listened to our beloved Dean, Dr. Harold Hudson bellow that the Doctor of Ministry degree would not be a degree that was given away. Little did he know that the amount of research, reflection and writing would surpass anything that Lawrence had written thus far. Dr. Hudson explained to them step by step what the process and expectations were.

The process and work for the first term would provide an opportunity for the students to evaluate our spiritual journey, analyze the context in which we would serve, and to synergize the two in order to produce a relevant research project. While writing the spiritual autobiography, Lawrence was challenged to take an in-depth look at his life and evaluate his years as a youth, discuss my maturation into adulthood, analyze the struggles and challenges that he faced and elaborate on God's divine presence in all of it. The writing of the contextual analysis was very rewarding. It allowed Lawrence to evaluate the context in which he served, the demographics of the community, the history of the church and the identifiable challenges that he faced.

During the second semester of the program we were instructed to begin the foundational papers. In this phase of the program, Lawrence was met with a serious problem that would affect his progress. He was faced with the reality of resigning from the church that he served while in the midst of the Doctoral process. Over a period of time, he wrestled with several issues with the trustee board and philosophical differences in terms of how ministry should be done. Lawrence could no longer serve at a church that was more concerned about control than helping the community in which it rested.

This dilemma caused Lawrence to change the context of his project from a church setting to the city of Richmond, Virginia. The relocating of the project called for Lawrence to rewrite the contextual analysis and synergy papers. This process placed him at a slight disadvantage because he would now find himself falling a little behind in his work, not to mention the mental stress of leaving the church and returning to secular employment. The whole episode caused him to lose his desire to write for several months.

As Lawrence asked God for the fortitude and strength to continue in the program, he began to start working on my foundational papers. While working on the foundation papers Lawrence was able to see how the process would eventually evolve into a viable project. The foundational papers afforded him the opportunity to look at the biblical, historical, and theological framework that shaped his project.

The peer sessions were a great time of sharing and reflection. The mentors were very instrumental in providing venues that supported the subject matter. The peer sessions were rewarding for many reasons, but probably the most rewarding was getting the opportunity to meet the namesake of our group, the esteemed, Dr. Gardner Calvin

Taylor. While very weak, he was still sharp of mind. In preparation of the group's arrival, the facilitator of the trip asked him if there was anything he wanted us to bring. Dr. Taylor asked her to ask us the question, and how then shall they carry my name? Obviously they were shocked due to the fact that this great man would have such lofty expectations of them. It was an awesome session where we would get the chance to dialogue with him and even ask him questions.

The preparation for the implementation phase was challenging as well as rewarding. At the onset, Lawrence had difficulty figuring out where he would work on the project. He knew the project would be about mentoring African American boys but with no church to work from, He had no idea what would be next. Fortunately Lawrence would be afforded the opportunity to work with some African American teenagers at a community center in the city of Richmond. From the beginning Lawrence recognized how this project would make a difference in the lives of these young men. These youth who were from underprivileged households where lack of resources and opportunity seemed to be the order of the day. During the actual implementation process Lawrence witnessed God move in a magnificent way. In the midst of the project, Lawrence observed several of the participants' attitudes change from negative to being positive as it related to their future. At the completion of the project, the participants were thankful to have gone through the entire process.

If Lawrence were to change part of the project, it would be in the length of time. He almost felt guilty in leaving those young men. As Lawrence left, He thought about the difference that could be made if he had the time to stay longer and to do more.

In the final writing phase of the project, Lawrence could not help but feel blessed to have been instrumental in assisting these young men with some of their personal issues. As he began to work on his final document, it afforded me the opportunity to reflect on the entire process.

Summary

This research project was birthed from many of Lawrence's personal experiences and challenges. The overall goal of the project was to help disadvantaged African American male youth recognize that regardless of what obstacles they may face, with hard work and the proper mentoring they could still succeed.

Chapter one represented the ministry focus. In this section Lawrence discuss his desire to contribute to the fields of Social Justice and Prophetic Leadership. This section also focuses on the merging of two papers, the Spiritual Autobiography and the Contextual Analysis. The purpose of merging the two papers was to identify a problem within his particular context. In this section you will find a detailed description of his life and issues. The spiritual autobiography shares the point of God's intervention in his life.

Chapter two captured the state of the art in this ministry project. This chapter brings in the literary work that argues and defends this project. In this chapter Lawrence discusses in narrative form, the support from various authors. The literature review also provides the authoritative background to the entire project. The literature review provides valuable insight to undergird the research project.

Chapter three consists of the foundation papers that undergird this research project. In the biblical foundation paper an exegesis of an Old Testament and New Testament scripture exemplify the problem and the solution described in the research

project. The Old Testament scripture provides a valid example from those that suffer with the condition to be discussed. The New Testament scripture is centered on the solution to achieve wholeness in the individual's life. The historical foundation paper is a detailed description regarding the history of mentoring and its attributes. The theological foundation paper brings in the thoughts of theologians who have provided the theological framework for support.

Chapter four is the methodology. This section discusses the research methods utilized for the project. The methodology was qualitative utilizing quantitative measures. This section also discusses the timelines for the project and the proposed outcomes

Chapter five is the field experience. In the chapter there is a detailed description of the six-week implementation process. There are also responses from the participants. There are group discussions available from the participants and reactions from the experience of the participants.

Future Work

It is Lawrence's desire that at some point, this research project be published. He feels as though this work will be an asset to both the religious and secular communities. It is his intention that this project be put to use in the not too distant future. It is Lawrence's desire to see disadvantaged youth across the spectrum have the opportunity to be exposed to viable mentoring. It is his belief that with the proper guidance and example, the future will be bright for these kids.

Conclusion

This research project caused the participants and Lawrence to be more determined. Lawrence's desire to be an advocate for young African American males has only intensified. The research project intensified what Lawrence's initial convictions were. He has always been one that has been sensitive to the needs of others; this project has only strengthened his resolve to make a difference in the lives of those who need mentoring.

Lawrence has really enjoyed the process and the Doctor of Ministry program. The program was rewarding and challenging for him on many levels. During the process, the faculty and staff were very helpful and supportive. His mentors, Dr. Lester McCorn and Dr. Jemison Hunter were very positive and supportive. Lawrence would like to thank all those that have helped him through this process. May God continue to grant all, His unmerited favor.

APPENDIX A
PRE TEST AND POST TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT

Lawrence Crosby Hood, Jr., M. Div.

PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

For each item identified below, circle the number to the right that best fits your judgment of its quality. Use the rating scale to select the quality number.

SURVEY ITEM		SURVEY SCALE				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	Is having a mentor to talk to important to you?	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Do you believe that you will succeed in life?	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Is getting a solid education important to you?	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Do you believe that you can overcome obstacles and succeed?	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Does it help you seeing examples of others doing what you want to do in life?	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Do you feel loved?	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Do you feel that you have the support to succeed in life?	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Do you feel that you are able to excel in school?	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Do you feel that your parent/parents are supportive?	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Do you feel that you have a bright future?	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B
CONTEXT ASSOCIATES

Context Associates

Jason Pough

Reginald D. Terry

Anthony Nutt

Yousef Dashell

APPENDIX C
A NEW DAY COMING

A New Day Coming

by Mychal Wynn

When the sun announces the dawning day
Just flex your muscles and start on your way.
Go over, or under, around, or through
Any obstacles or hurdles that challenge you.
There's a new day coming.

Cast aside the failures of yesterday.
Forget the peaks and valleys that have paved your way.
Wipe the sweat from your brow and the dust from your shoe.
Take a breath and relax so that you may begin anew.
There's a new day coming.

Forget the burdens and obstacles that have held you back.
Focus on your dreams and prepare a plan of attack.
There are battles awaiting to challenge your success.
Daring you to stand tall and to give it your best.
There's a new day coming.

No matter how great the journey, or how heavy the load
How steep the mountain, or how rough the road.
When your arms grow weary and legs give way
Stop and rest for a moment, it will be okay.
There's a new day coming.

As shadows spring forth from the setting sun.
Take a moment and savor the battles you've won.
Sleep peacefully tonight and enjoy your rest.
Awaken tomorrow and continue your quest.
There's always, a new day coming.

APPENDIX D

PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Doctoral Research Project

Partial fulfillment for the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Lawrence Crosby Hood, Jr.

PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This is to certify that I, _____, Participant of this group understand that any information (written, verbal or other form) obtained during the performance of my duties must remain confidential. This includes all information about members, volunteers, families, employees and other associate organizations, as well as any other information otherwise marked or known to be confidential.

I understand that any unauthorized release or carelessness in the handling of this confidential information is considered a breach of the duty to maintain confidentiality.

I further understand that any breach of the duty to maintain confidentiality could be grounds for immediate dismissal and/or possible liability in any legal action arising from such breach.

Signature of Participant

Date

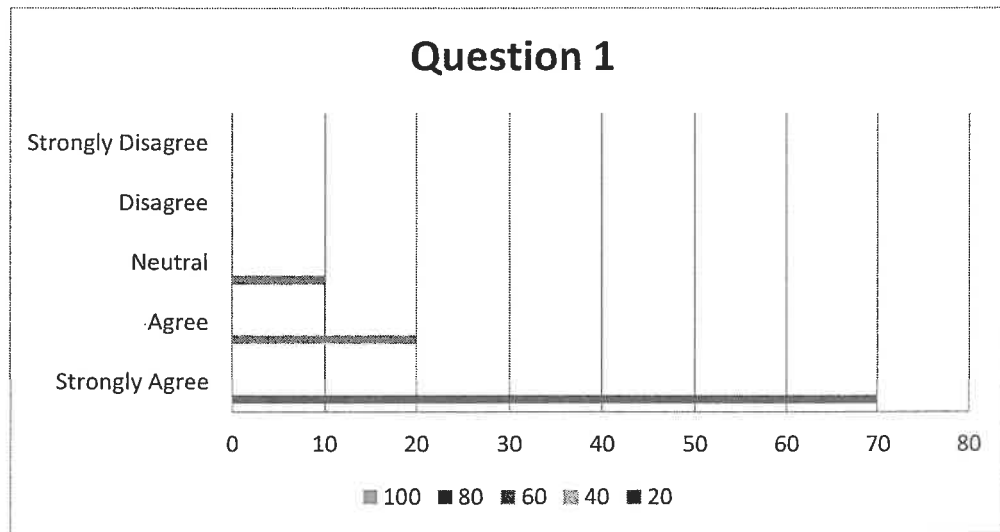
Signature of Facilitator

APPENDIX E
CHARTS AND GRAPHS

Pre Test

1. Is having a mentor to talk to important to you?

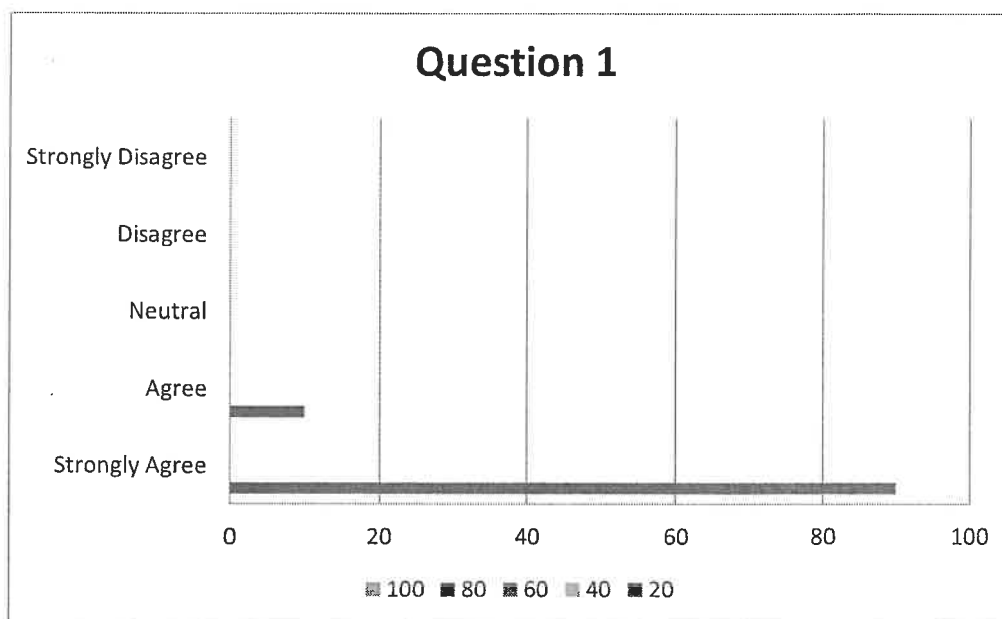
During the pre-test 70% strongly agreed, 20% agreed, and 10% were neutral.



Post-Test

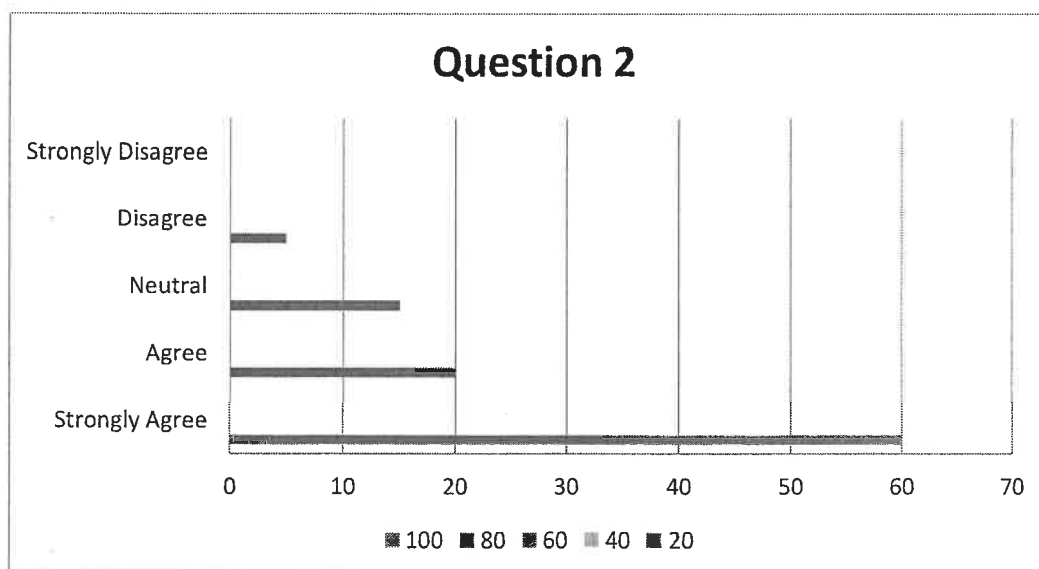
Is having a mentor to talk to important to you?

During the post-test 90% strongly agreed and 10 % agreed.



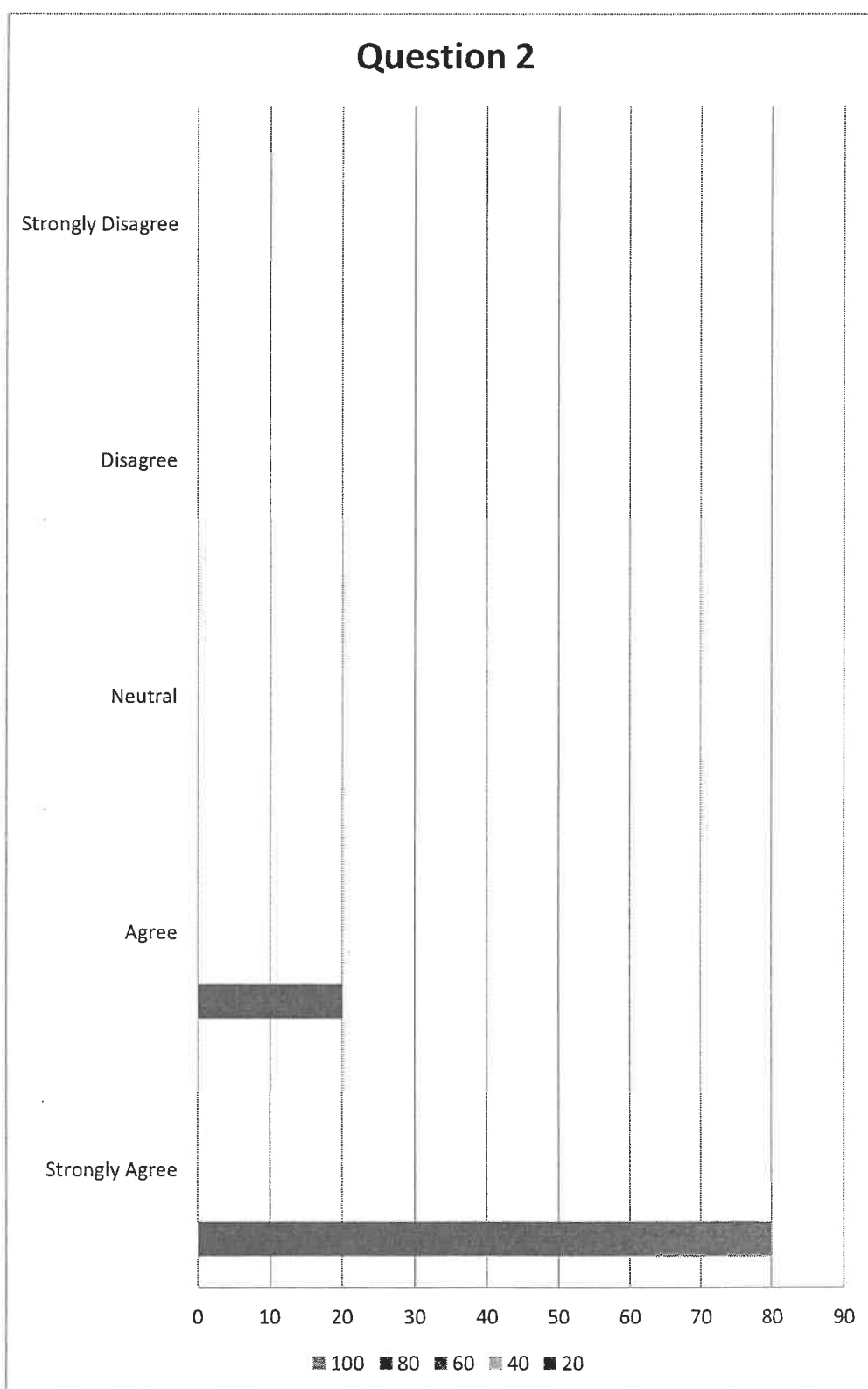
Pre-Test

2. Do you believe that you will succeed in life?
 During the pre-test 60% strongly agreed, 20% agreed, 15% were neutral, and 5% disagreed.



Post-Test

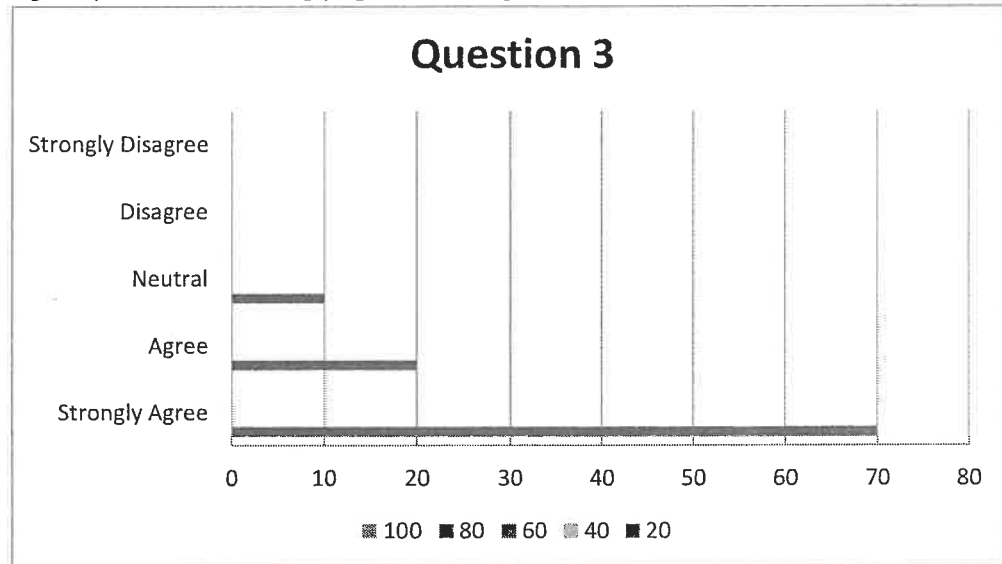
Do you believe that you will succeed in life?
 During the post-test 80% strongly agreed and 20% agreed.



Pre-Test

3. Is getting a solid education important to you?

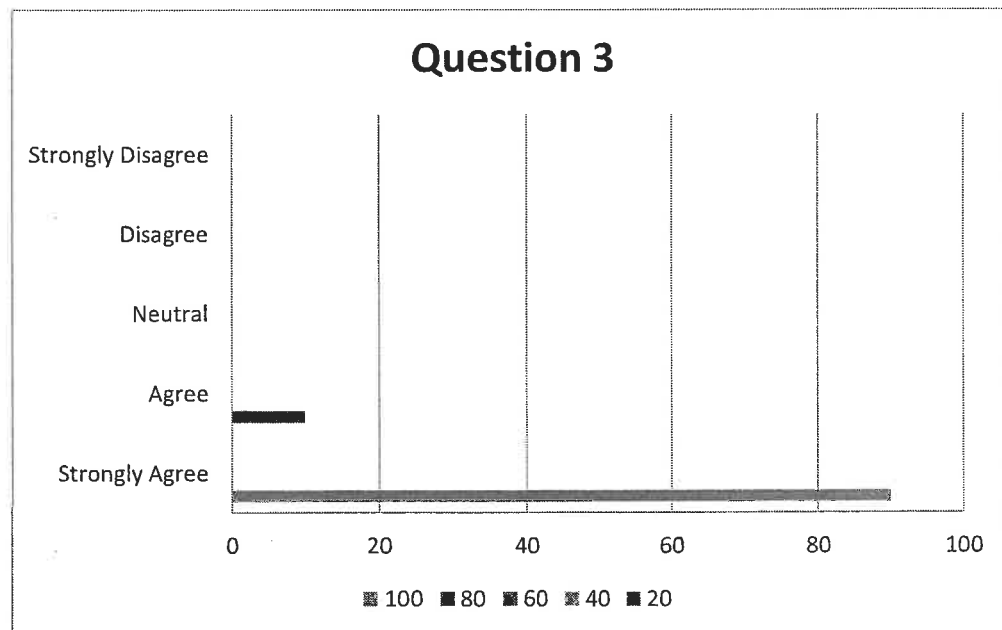
During the pre-test 70% strongly agreed, 20% agreed, and 10% neutral.



Post-Test

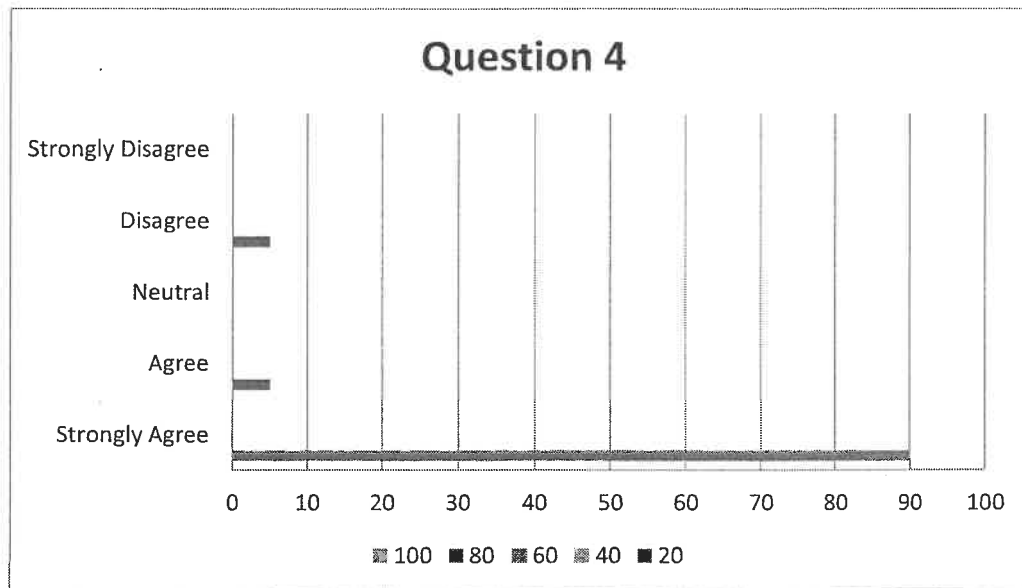
Is getting a solid education important to you?

During the post –test 90% strongly agreed and 10% agreed.

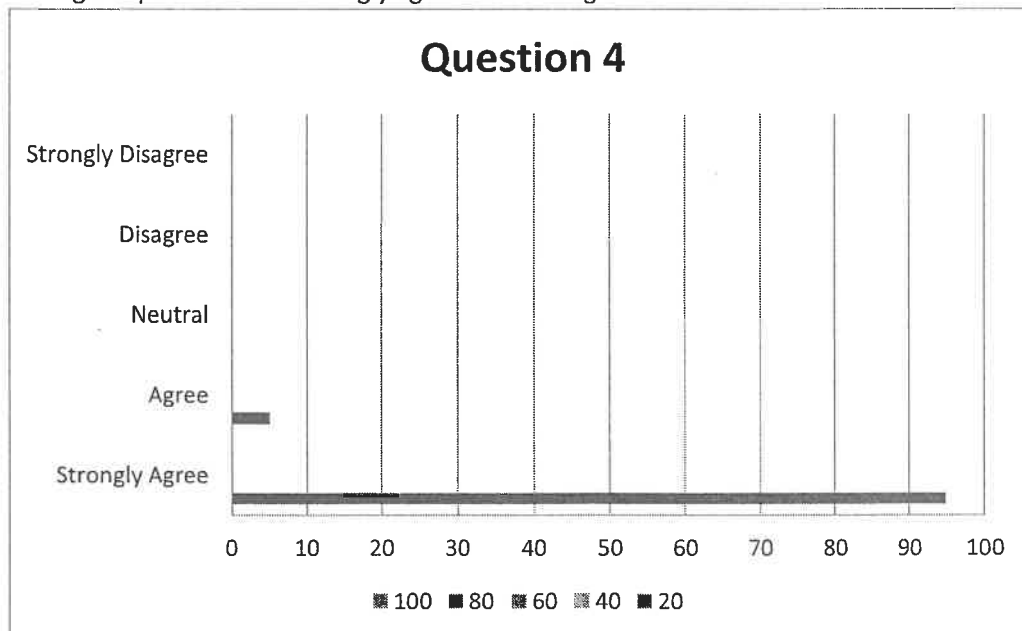


Pre-Test

4. Do you believe that you can overcome obstacles and succeed?
During the pre-test 90% strongly agreed, 5% agreed, and 5% disagreed.

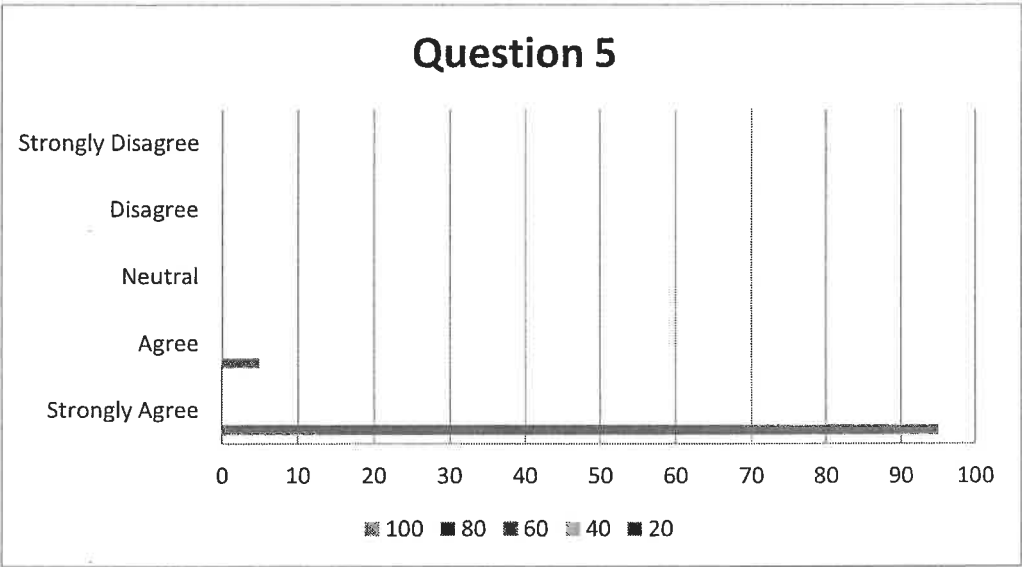
**Post-Test**

- Do you believe that you can overcome obstacles and succeed?
During the post-test 95% strongly agreed and 5% agreed.



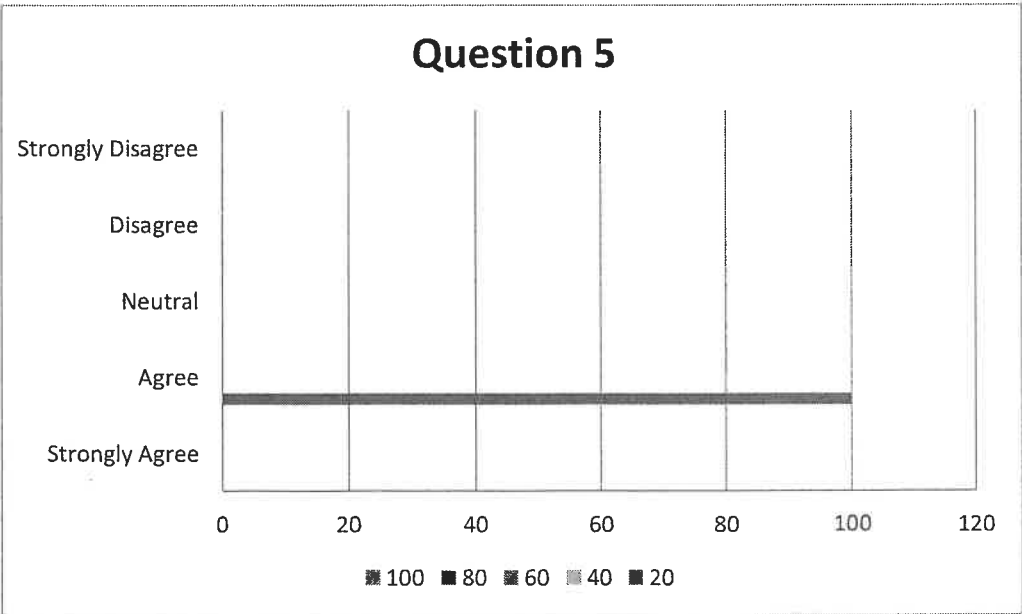
Pre-Test

5. Does it help you seeing examples of others doing what you want to do in life?
During the pre-test 95% strongly agreed and 5% agreed.



Post-Test

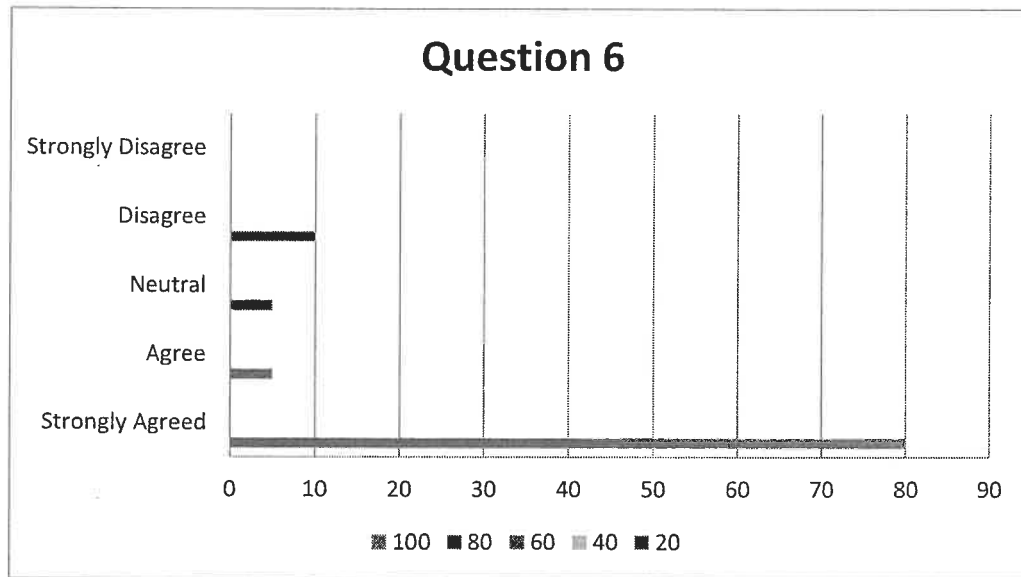
- Does it help you seeing examples of others doing what you want to do in life?
During the post-test 100% agreed.



Pre-Test

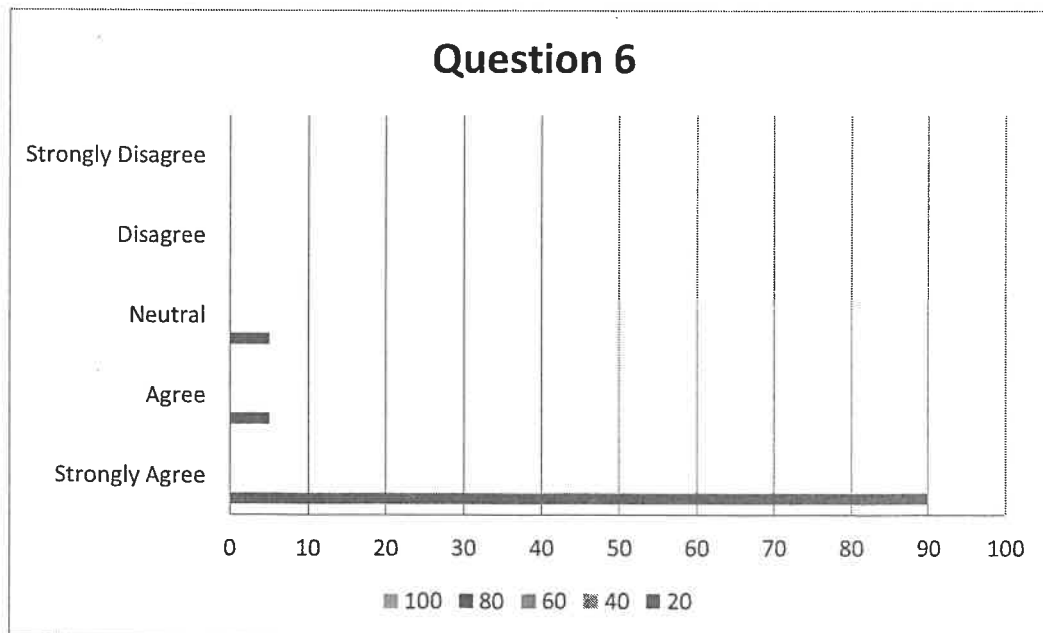
6. Do you feel loved?

During the pre-test 80% strongly agreed, 5% agreed, 5% were neutral, and 10% disagreed.



Post-Test

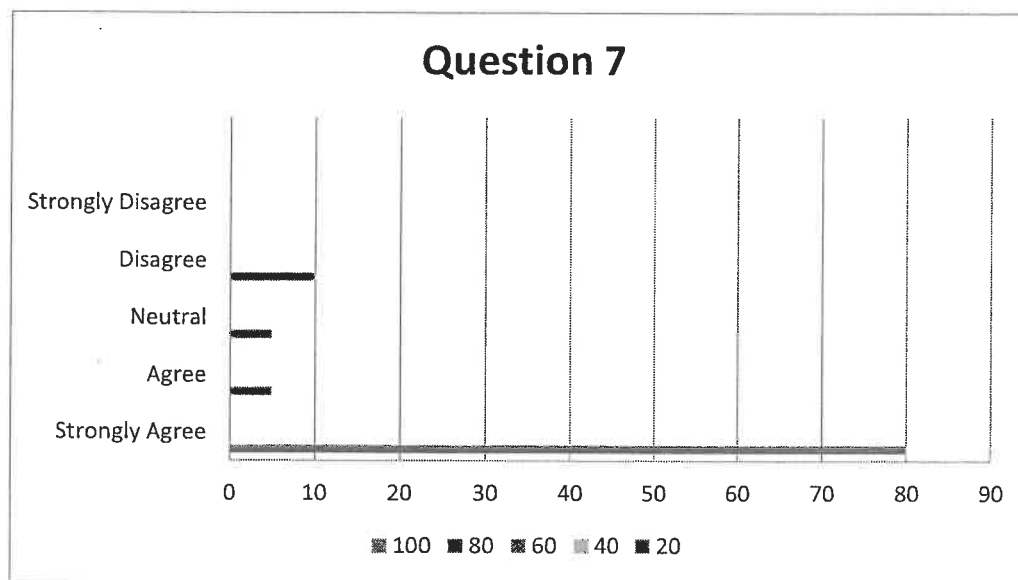
During the post-test 90% strongly agreed, 5% agreed, and 5% were neutral.



Pre-Test

7. Do you feel that you have the support to succeed in life?

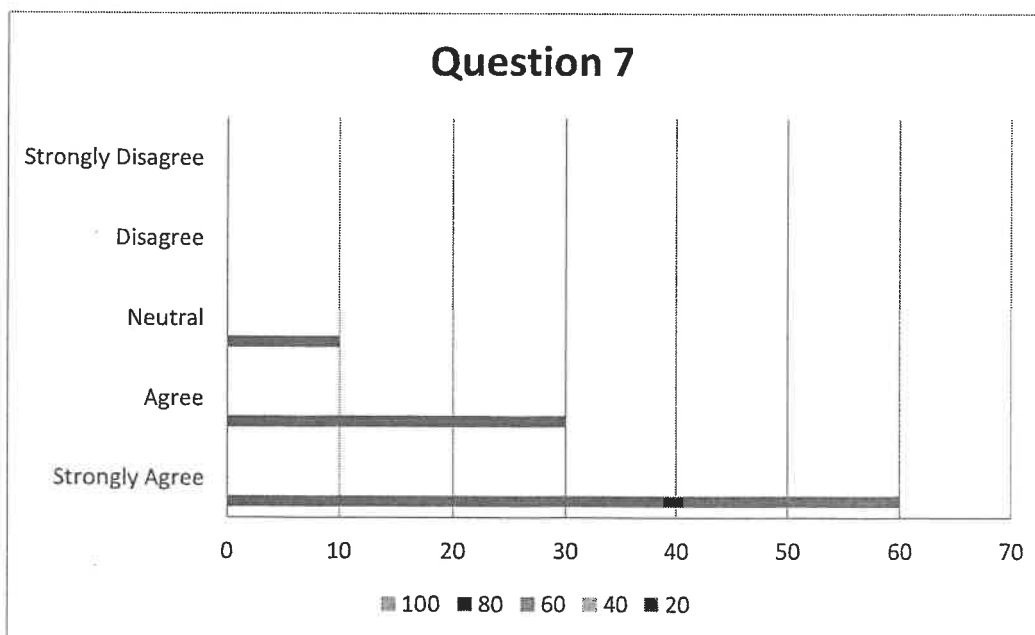
During the pre-test 20% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, 25% were neutral, and 5% disagreed.



Post-Test

Do you feel that you have the support to succeed in life?

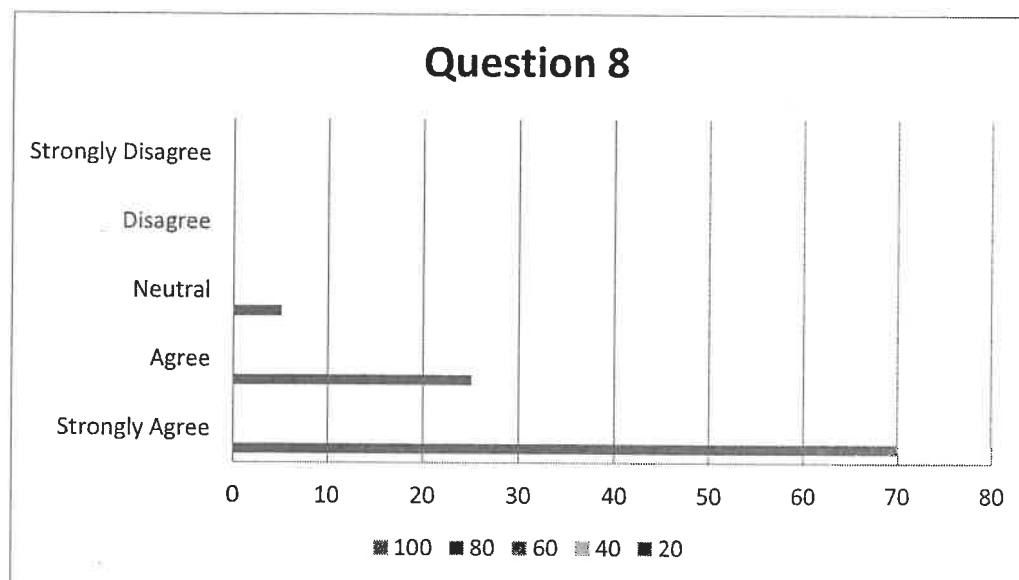
During the post-test 60% strongly agreed, 30% agreed, and 10% were neutral.



Pre-Test

8. Do you feel that you are able to excel in school?

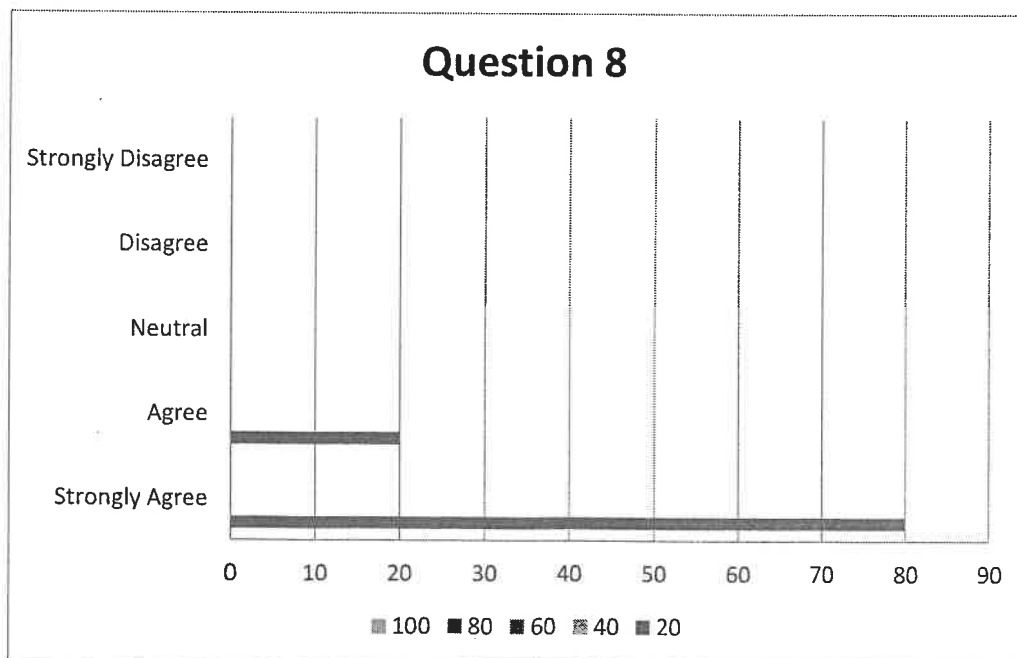
During the pre-test 70% strongly agreed, 25% agreed, 5% were neutral.



Post-Test

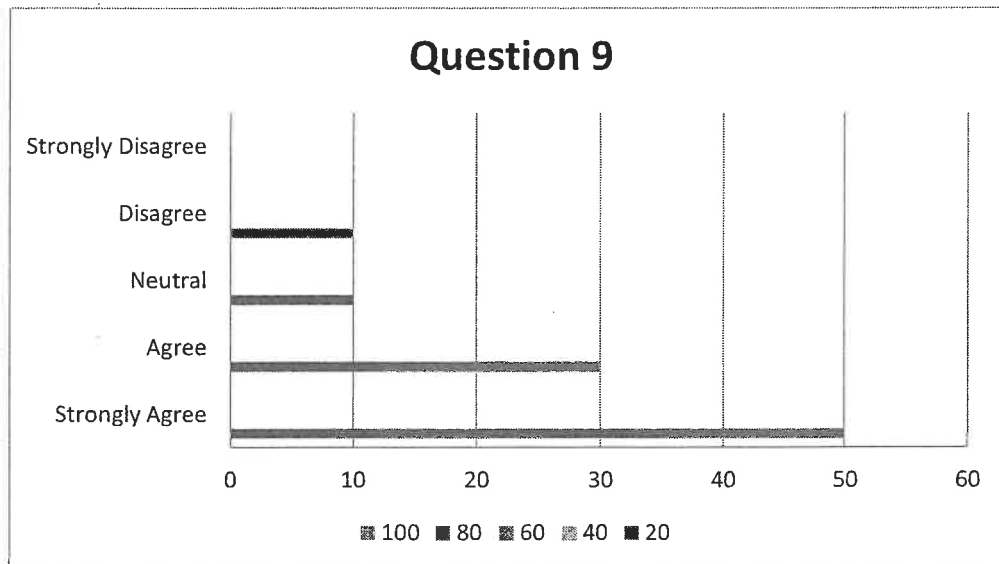
Do you feel that you are able to excel in school?

During the post-test 80% strongly agreed and 20% agreed.



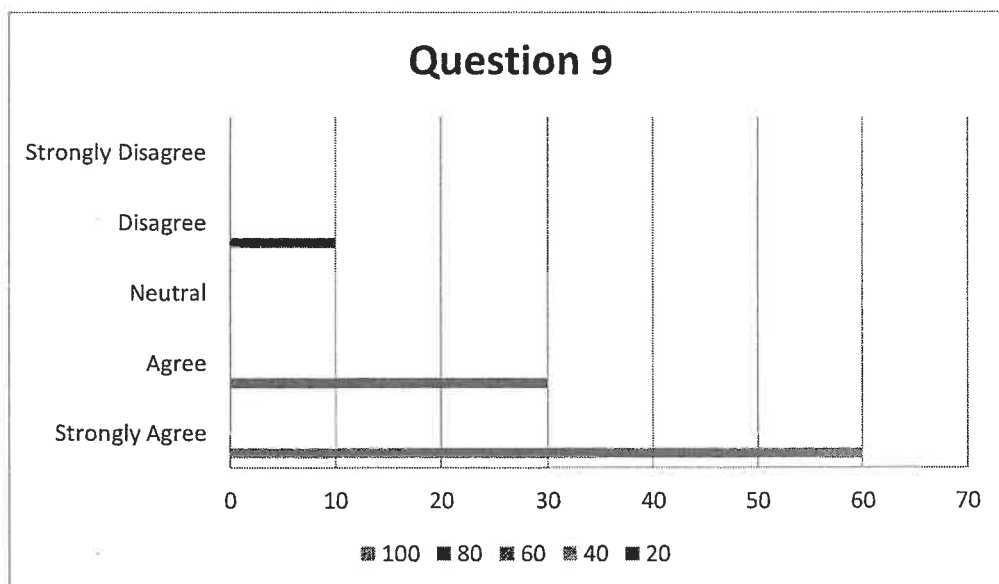
Pre-Test

9. Do you feel that your parent/parents are supportive?
During the pre-test 50% strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 10% were neutral, and 10% disagreed.



Post-Test

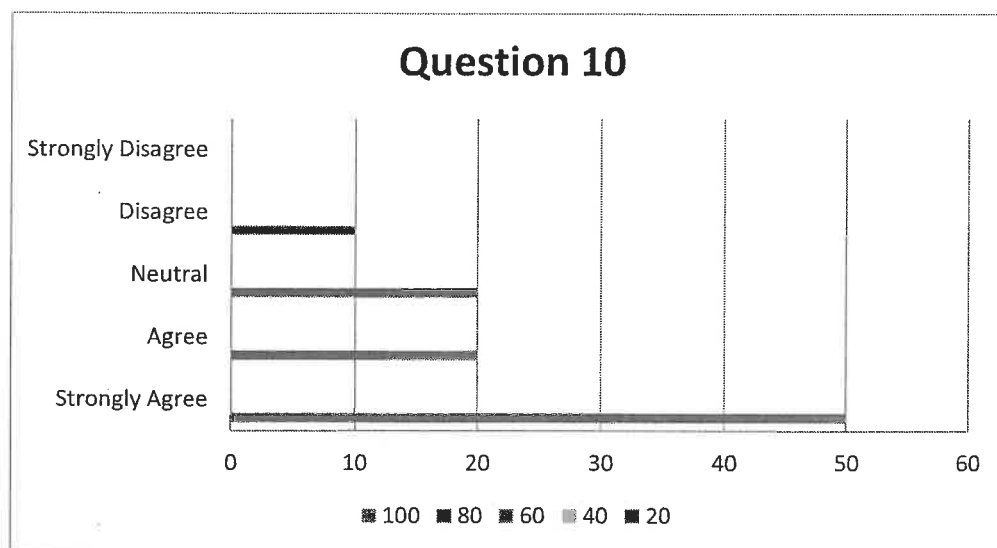
- Do you feel that your parent/parents are supportive?
During the post-test 60% strongly agreed, 30% agreed, and 10% disagreed.



Pre-Test

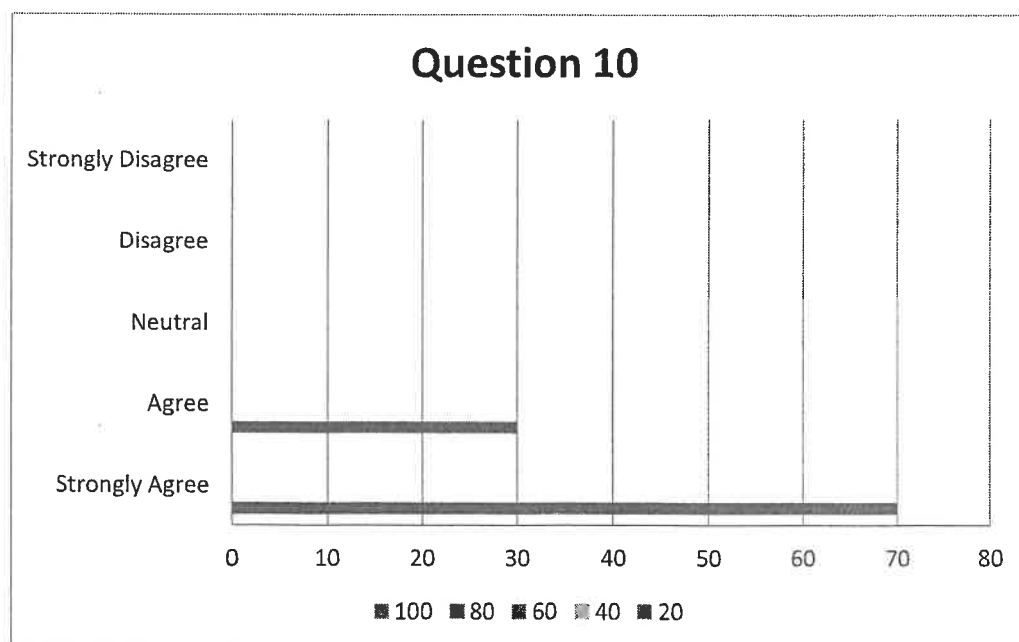
10. Do you feel that you have a bright future?

During the pre-test 50% strongly agreed, 20% were neutral, and 10% disagreed.

**Post-Test**

Do you feel that you have a bright future?

During the post-test 70% strongly agreed and 30% agreed.



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